

# **The Role of the Internet in the December 2011 Moscow Protests**

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### **ABSTRACT**

At the end of 2011, thousands of Moscow citizens protested against the December 4 election results for the 450-member Russian State Duma, the lower legislative chamber. In the months leading up to election, an increasing number of Russian citizens had become angry and frustrated over rampant corruption and a worsening socio-economic situation. The flawed elections were the final straw in making many Russians realize their lack of power and influence in the political process. Such Internet resources as LiveJournal and Facebook raised public awareness of the rigged elections in a new way.

For several years prior to 2011, Russians with access to the Internet had been engaging in online discussions about their discontent with the 'power vertical' regime and its inability to address many social problems-- the most acute of which is rampant corruption. For the first time in Russian history, politically engaged citizens used the Internet and, more specifically, Web 2.0 to mount large-scale and highly successful protests. In a country in which media is highly censored, the Moscow protests, point directly to the crucial role of a free Internet in mobilizing the middle class.

To have an objective and unbiased opinion of the role of new technologies in social protests within the Russian society, there needs to be an understanding of the fact that Russian protests of the middle class occurred within a 10 year system of 'managed democracy'. This period of time must be examined within the context of Russia's thousand year history. Any study of the technology's penetration into the society, without an exploration of the social processes taking place in such a country, will inevitably create a distorted picture.

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## INTRODUCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

“It must be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than a new system. For the initiator has the enmity of all who would profit by the preservation of the old institution and merely lukewarm defenders in those who gain by the new ones. ”

Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli *“The Prince”*

In 2011 the world was rocked by various social uprisings-- the ‘Arab Spring’ revolts, the ‘Jasmine’ protests in China, the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ movement in the United States, as well as the unprecedented mass protests in Russia, the first since the fall of communism. These events occurred in countries with different historical and socio-cultural backgrounds as well as diverse political systems. But there was one commonality surrounding these events - the protesters’ use of the Internet to organize the masses. As these protests have shown, the Internet is much more than a mere logistical tool in fomenting acts of political activism.

Commenting on the situation, Zbigniew Brzezinski, former U.S. National Security Advisor stated:

For the first time in human history almost all of humanity is politically activated, politically conscious and politically interactive....The nearly universal access to radio, television and increasingly the Internet is creating a community of shared perceptions and envy that can be galvanized and channeled by demagogic political or religious passions (Marshall, 2011).

Today, in repressive regimes around the globe, the Internet constitutes the only media tool able to disseminate information about the true nature of those regimes and rulers, about the perpetrated atrocities, corruption and injustice. The Internet, just like the printing press, spreads not just media consumption but media production as well, allowing people to privately and publicly express and debate a plethora of conflicting views (Shirky, *The Political Power of Social Media Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change*, 2011).

Having access to information and the means to express their views endows individuals, no matter their physical or social position, with a true sense of self-worth, a sense of belonging to a larger group--a micro society<sup>1</sup>. On a macro level, this ‘online’ civic activity develops a ‘public

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<sup>1</sup> characterized by voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange

sphere' (Habermas, 1962), thereby assisting in creating civil societies where they have not existed before.

In this respect, no government or regime can completely isolate its citizens from engaging in civic life. Thus technology plays a role in furthering the noble aspirations of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 19 clearly reads: "Everyone has the right to ... receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

For a long time there has been a general feeling that the Russian middle class was preoccupied with amassing material wealth and was not interested in political activity of any sort (McFaul, 2002, p.104). Many experts felt that Russians, just like the Soviet citizens, instinctively knew how to survive in a totalitarian state, extracting what they needed while not opposing the regime. But at the end of 2011 in Moscow, thousands of citizens protested against the election results of the State Duma. Rampant corruption and the worsening socio-economic situation continue to be sources of discontent for an increasing number of Russian citizens. But the flawed elections made many Russians realize that they cannot influence the political process to change the situation in their country. Many experts were quick to claim that the Russian urban middle class had finally made manifest the emergence of civic consciousness within the system of 'managed democracy'. In the words of a Chatham House report (Hanson, 2012) "*Russians are beginning to flex their muscles as citizens rather than to behave merely as subjects...*"

And the Internet has played an important role in this process. For several years prior to 2011, Russians with access to the Internet had been engaging in online discussions about their discontent with the 'power vertical' regime and its inability to address many social problems—especially rampant corruption.

In spite of these online conversations, the opposition rallies were at first only able to assemble several hundred people on the streets of big cities. Small numbers of protestors were immediately marginalized and discredited by the government controlled media, while state police did not hesitate to use excessive force. However, following the December elections, online media outlets such as YouTube, Twitter, LiveJournal and Facebook spread images of shameless election-day violations during voting and ballot counting as well.

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights that observed the December 4, 2011 parliamentary (State Duma) elections expressed serious concerns regarding the "quality of

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the [election] process... characterized by frequent procedural violations and instances of apparent manipulation, including several serious indications of ballot box stuffing...”

(OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, 2011) Such blatant disregard for citizen voices, widely posted via social media became a catalyst for unrest. Popular dissent reached a critical mass and drove people from their computers to the streets in such unprecedented numbers that the government could no longer use the old tactics of intimidation. Many experts argue that in the absence of the Internet, daily news updates about the corruption as well as reports of election fraud would not have been disseminated to the population, nor would such news be discussed in a public arena. Additionally, without the Internet and social media, the urban middle class would not have had the means to organize a large enough protest-- a so-called ‘prerequisite’ for the Kremlin not to use police force as it had before.

Henceforth this paper will analyze the role of the Internet in the Moscow protests following the December 2011 elections. Given that in present day Russia all other media outlets in one way or another are controlled by the Kremlin and that large public gatherings require state approval, the Internet has developed into a vibrant platform for open discussions related to the country's deplorable condition. RuNet users' demands are gradually transforming the Internet from an entertainment venue to a political tool, making an organized uprising of the urban middle class a reality. Vladimir Putin faced his first serious political crisis as election fraud and the prospect of 12 more years without new leadership drew tens of thousands of protesters to the streets.

While the events in Moscow were far from being a revolution or even an attempted one, Russian protesters did share the desire of other revolutionaries to better their society by making it more open and, as a consequence, more just. All acts of revolution and mass protest rely on some form of communication, be it a word of mouth, a leaflet, a telegram or a text message and the Russian uprising was no different. The protestors' use of the Internet, and more specifically, Web 2.0, lead to demonstrations of significant magnitude in the Russian history.

But even though many commentators, like Thomas Friedman of *The New York Times* (2012) and Leon Aaron of *Foreign Policy* (2012) have announced the birth of the Russian middle class' civic consciousness and proclaimed the revolutionary role of Internet media in organized opposition to the Putin regime, deeper analysis is still needed. Quick conclusions that the Internet will be instrumental and ensure victory to the opposition against the Putin regime need to be taken with the proverbial grain of salt. The role of the Internet in facilitating political protest is not the same in every society.

Since the Internet is an expression of human ingenuity, its role must be studied in the context of the society in which it exists. Society's attitudes, demands and preferences give attributes to different communication platforms from newspapers to the Internet. Morozov (2011) reminds us that throughout history there has rarely been a new technology that that was not heralded as the ultimate democracy tool, "from the railways, which Karl Marx believed would dissolve India's caste system, to television, that greatest "liberator" of the masses" (Ibid.).

From this vantage point, a brief exploration of the history of ICTs within Russian society is necessary along with the history of freedom of speech and public sphere in Russia. Therefore, this paper will use secondary academic sources to evaluate Russian society's transformation from imperial autocracy to the current managed democracy regime. This history will be viewed through the prism of Marxist theory. My project will demonstrate how one class of society-- be it the monarchy, the Communist Party's apparatchiks or Putin's oligarchic bureaucrats-- has always oppressed the masses via censorship. Through such oppressive means, the ruling parties continue to safeguard their own right to control the distribution of state revenues. This paper will focus in particular on analyzing how the Putin regime, having nurtured the middle class, can no longer satisfy its ever-increasing demands. The past decade has seen the demands of Russian society move up the pyramid of Maslow's hierarchy of needs to an extent that the current government cannot fully address.

Secondly, my project will examine and analyze the exact role of the Internet within Russian society through the lens of Habermas' theory of 'communicative action'. As the Internet continues to permeate Russian society, it would be a mistake to assume that all users are politically active citizens, that they use the Internet to access political materials and are inspired to take to the streets in protest upon reading them. While the Internet is a new medium of communication, it is still subject to the sociological and psychological aspects of the society in which it exists. By spreading awareness of sociopolitical grievances and sounding a call to protest, social media is slowly bringing like-minded individuals together in modern Russia, a fragmented and socially disconnected society. However, every society is composed of various classes that tolerate and respond to social grievances in different ways before "critical mass" is reached and the people demand change through public protests. In this respect, the results of



the Russian protests may not mirror those of the Arab 'Twitter revolutions' as has been suggested by US Senator John McCain in his Twitter blog<sup>2</sup>.

In discussing how the Moscow protestors have used the Internet to mobilize, this paper will rely on the 'resource mobilization theory' that stems from revolution theory. Therefore, this paper will draw upon statistical polls of the Moscow protestors in order to determine which issues and grievances motivated them to protest. This information will help to explain who the protestors were, what they desired and how they learned of the protests. After a review of society and technology is conducted, my project will present an analysis of the immediate actions of the protestors during the December demonstrations. To this end, my paper will utilize the theory of 'critical mass' to analyze how 'virtual' discontent spilled 'offline' into actual street protests.

These extrapolations about the Russian protestors and their use of the Internet will then be briefly compared with the Arab 'twitter revolutions' to determine whether any parallels may be drawn for further research.

Finally, the concluding part of this paper will offer recommendations for further research of the issues that will undoubtedly develop in the coming years. Given the continued 'reign' of Vladimir Putin, further study may seek to establish a deeper understanding how the system of 'managed democracy' will deal with its apparent *zugzwang*.

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<sup>2</sup> "Dear Vlad (Vladimir Putin), The ArabSpring is coming to a neighborhood near you" was 'tweetted' by McCain on 06/12/2011.

## RESEARCH QUESTION/THESIS STATEMENT

This paper will assess the role of the Internet in the unprecedented uprisings of the middle class in Moscow at the end of 2011 and in the beginning of 2012. While it is extremely difficult if not impossible to unequivocally determine that in the absence of Web 2.0, the Moscow uprisings would not have occurred, this paper will attempt to present undisputable evidence pointing to the leading role of the Internet in making the Moscow protests of the middle class a reality.

Any revolutionary or semi-revolutionary movement needs tools to organize. In today's world ICTs are the most cost-effective and universally available tools to mobilize the masses. Additionally, in today's repressive regimes which censor most forms of communication, the Internet *a priori* is the only tool which can be used to inform the public and create a critical mass. The Moscow protests, in a country rife with public grievances and a censored media, present a strong example of the crucial role of the Internet in mobilizing the middle class toward political action.

Therefore this paper argues that in the absence of Web 2.0, the Moscow uprisings would not have occurred.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Taking into account the unprecedented nature of the events that took place in December of 2011 on the streets of Moscow, this study aims to uncover the exact role played by the Internet in the manifestation of mass protests. Essentially, the objective of this research is to illustrate the grievances of the middle class and the protesters' reliance on the Internet. These two elements established a virtual civil society and a critical mass. This paper will examine the history of free speech within Russian society leading up to the current situation of repressed media and unrestricted Internet.

The study stresses that for Russia's successful transition from managed to representative democracy, political experts and academics must have more realistic expectations as to the role of the middle class and the ITCs as well. As revolutionary theory explains, for concrete political change to occur, there must be a leader who can lead the masses and replace the current regime, as well as "an alliance between urban intellectuals and peasants" Huntington (1968). Neither of these is present in Russia today. In addition, Russian society does not exhibit the two other revolutionary prerequisites described by Vladimir Lenin (1913, p. 49). He wrote that "lower classes' unwillingness to live as before is not enough for a revolution. Revolution necessitates the situation when the upper classes can no longer rule and manage as before."

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Taking into consideration the space limitations of this paper, as well as the timeline for the completion of the project, it became impossible to present an overview of all the social classes and all the territories of the Russian Federation in connection with the Internet and civil society. Thus, even though the middle class protests occurred in several major cities of the Russian Federation, this paper will focus on the most numerous ones in Moscow.

Since it is impossible to interview each protester individually, this paper will use statistical data collected by the most respected Russian sociological centers. Nevertheless the data presented contains statistical errors and varies from center to center. Additionally, it must be noted that some statistical reports exhibit such differences that the author had no other choice but to present the two sets of data and use footnotes for further explanations.

Even the most seasoned sociologists and political scientists are at odds in explaining the direct cause of the sudden protests. Additionally, when comparing the events in Moscow with those of the 'Arab Spring', it is impossible to establish absolute parallels since these two cultures are quite disparate and one needs to be an expert in both to draw direct parallels and conclusions.

Finally, as this paper touches upon events that are still developing and being discussed by academics, it is challenging to find and apply time-tested theories and constructs to such recent history. Thus, core Marxist and revolutionary theories had to be augmented by more modern ones. Empirical work on the subject is also hard to come by, in part because ICTs are so new and in part because relevant examples are so rare, while the majority of the theoretical works have been published before the 'Web 2.0 revolution'.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Civil society-** according to Keane (2004, p. 41) traditionally a civil society meant a realm of social life where groups, clubs and associations were institutionally separated from the state. This notion anticipated the self-organizing and self-reflexive nature of such institutions. Additionally they are expected to be permanently in tension, both with each other and with governmental institutions. Important contributions to the understanding of the concept of civil society were made by Hobbes and by Hegel. Hobbes saw in it the overcoming of the primitive "natural condition of war of all against all" (Levy, 1954). Hegel recognized in it the ability by one's own labor to benefit self and neighbor. Only Marx, commenting on the history of the Paris Commune, saw in it the civil society that rose against the state machine (Clegg, Boreham, 1986).

More recently, in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and elsewhere, civil society played a vital role in establishing resistance to totalitarian regimes after the crushing of the Prague Spring. Civil societies are instrumental in most political efforts to push back or overthrow dictatorship around the world.

**Managed democracy-** According to Lipman (2001) and McFaul (2001) the system created by Vladimir Putin has all the formal institutions of democracy: elections, parties, the civil society while the real autonomy of these institutions, and therefore their real capacity to influence the actions of the state is severely limited.

**Sovereign democracy-** This term is attributed to Vladislav Surkov, who has served as deputy chief of staff of the presidential administration under Putin. Surkov is a prominent proponent of the view that democratic revolutions in the former Soviet Union were orchestrated by Western governments (Spechler, 2010).

**Twitter revolution-** According to Shirky (The twitter revolution more than just a slogan, 2010) the term refers to the acts of real revolution with the use of mobile phones, which allowed the original protesters to broadcast their actions to other citizens and to the wider world with remarkable speed and immediacy.

**Middle class-** Marxism defines social classes according to their relationship with the means of production. The "middle class" is said to be the class below the ruling class and above the proletariat. Marx also suggested that the "middle class" was becoming merged with the working

classes via the 'petite bourgeoisie'<sup>3</sup>. In applying Marxist theory to modern realities it could be argued that today typical members of the middle class are "salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production" (Clegg, Boreham, 1986) and as wage earners are paid to produce a piece of capital. This 'professional-managerial class' with incomes above the average for their country, is mainly distinguished from other social classes by their training and education.

**Web 2.0-** defined as the intersection of web application features that facilitate participatory information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design, and collaboration on the World Wide Web via a social media dialogue. Today Web 2.0 is represented by a number of sites like Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, Youtube, etc.

**Runet** – the Russian language Internet.

**ICT(s)** -Information communication technologies.

**Social networks-** Web 2.0 sites that join users based on various parameters i.e. interests, experience, career needs and personal wants.

**The tandem-** Prime Minister Putin and President Medvedev (as of December 2011). Even though the mass public protests happened when Medvedev was Russia's President *de jure*, Putin never ceased to be the *de facto* country's leader and the 'tandem's' decision maker (Gessen, 2012).

**Vertical of power-**at the start of his presidency, Vladimir Putin announced that he would consolidate political powers in Russia into the so-called 'power vertical'.

**Digital divide-** refers to any inequalities between groups, broadly construed, in terms of access to, use of, or knowledge of information and communication technologies.

**Public sphere-** Habermas (1962 p. 103) defines the public sphere, that exists outside of the control by the state, as a space where individuals exchange views and knowledge via newspapers, journals, reading clubs, Masonic lodges, and coffeehouses. The essential characteristic of the *public sphere* culture for Habermas (Ibid.) is its "critical" nature characterized by a dialogue either in actual conversation or via the print media. Writing about the next stage of the development of the public sphere, 'a networked public sphere' Benkler in *The Wealth of Networks How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (2006, p.10-

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<sup>3</sup> Owners of small property who may not employ wage labor

11) observed that the networked information economy enables a transition from the mass-mediated public sphere to a networked public sphere. This transition is also based on the increasing freedom individuals enjoy to participate in creating information and knowledge, and the possibilities it presents for a new public sphere to emerge alongside the commercial, mass-media markets. Thus there is the emergence of new, decentralized approaches to fulfilling the watchdog function and to engaging in political debate and organization.

**Democracy-** (liberal democracy) may include elements such as political pluralism, equality before the law, the right to petition elected officials for redress of grievances, due process, civil liberties, human rights, as well as freedom of political expression, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press. Additionally a basic feature of democracy is the capacity of individuals to participate freely and fully in the life of their society (Dunn, 1993).

**Intelligentsia-** (Rus. интеллигенция)- Dictionary of Vladimir Dal defines intelligentsia as: "intelligent, educated, intellectually developed part of the society." Originally composed of nobles, the intelligentsia in Russia came to be dominated by classless of people ("raznochintsy") after 1861. In the ideology of Bolsheviks, *intelligentsia* was not a class of its own but rather a mid-layer ("*prosloyka*") between "toilers" and "exploiters".

**Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943)** - is often portrayed in the shape of a pyramid, with the largest and most fundamental levels of needs at the bottom, and the need for self-actualization at the top.

**Zugzwang** - (German for "compulsion to move") is a term that finds its formal definition in combinatorial game theory. It describes a situation where one player weakens his position because he is obliged to make a move when he would prefer to pass and make no move.

**Blat** (Russian блат )- Professor Alena Ledeneva (2009) of the University College London defines the Russian phenomenon of 'blat' as obtaining goods and services by circumventing the established Soviet distribution system.

**LiveJournal**—started in 1999 by an American programmer as a way of keeping his high school friends updated on his activities. This social network, now owned by SUP Media, allows users to keep a blog, a journal or a diary. A wide variety of political pundits also use the service for political commentary, particularly in Russia, where it partners with the politically independent online newspaper Gazeta.ru (also owned by parent company SUP Media).

**Lifeworld-** (German *Lebenswelt*) may be conceived as a universe of what is self-evident or given, a world that subjects may experience together. For Habermas (1962) a 'lifeworld' is the lived realm of informal, culturally-grounded understandings and mutual accommodations; it is

the "background" environment of competences, practices, and attitudes representable in terms of one's cognitive horizon.

**Collective unconscious** - Carl Jung (1996, p.43) explained "...there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents."

**Siloviki-** (Russian Силовики) the word "siloviki" is derived from the phrase 'silovye struktury' (force structures), a reference to the armed services, law enforcement bodies, and intelligence agencies that wield the coercive power of the state. Silovik (plural: siloviki) is a current or former official from any of these government bodies (Bremmer, 2006).

**Web 2.0 revolution-** Collectively, Facebook, YouTube, and Flickr are only about six years old. Twitter was first launched in 2006, but is only now beginning to be used strategically by civil society groups in repressive environments.

**CPSU-** The Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

**Leviathan State-** Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury (1588 –1679), set out a social contract theory. There is no doctrine of separation of powers in Hobbes's discussion, while the sovereign must control civil, military, judicial, and ecclesiastical powers. According to Hobbes, society is a population beneath a sovereign authority, to whom all individuals in that society cede some rights for the sake of protection and any abuses of power by this authority are to be accepted as the price of peace (Levy, 1954).



## LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to form an objective and unbiased opinion on the role of the new technologies in social protests within Russian society, there needs to be an analysis of such a society within the context of history and sociology. Etling, Faris and Palfrey (2010, p. 39) argue that to understand the role of digital tools on a democratic processes, “[one] must better understand the impact of the use of these tools on the composition and role of civil society.”

The protests of the Russian middle class occurred within a 10 year system of ‘managed democracy’ which in its turn exists within a thousand<sup>4</sup> year Russian history. Therefore, the literature review in this paper will first examine previous academic works related to the distinct relationship between the Russian public and civil society, followed by an examination of the system of ‘managed democracy’. It will then offer an analysis of scholarly works describing the Internet as a new tool of expression for the grievances of civil society in Russia and elsewhere around the world.

### ***THE RUSSIAN PUBLIC AND CIVIL SOCIETY***

Katrina vanden Heuvel (2012) the editor, publisher, and part-owner of the magazine *The Nation* calls the Moscow protests “the most striking display of grassroots democracy.” However, social protests against the state’s unfairness are an established practice of civil society in mature democracies. Furthermore, the public’s self-organization in social networks is simply a new form of self-organization that has taken place for centuries in churches, pubs and clubs using sermons, leaflets and newspapers. Nevertheless, such manifestations of civil society are a new phenomenon in countries with outright dictatorship regimes like Libya or Tunis as well as in countries with a ‘soft authoritarian’ regime like Russia or Belarus.

Russian society’s intricate relations with civil society stems from the country’s historical and geographical specificities that have put it on a developmental track that is different from neighboring European countries. Writing about 18th century Europe, German sociologist and philosopher Jurgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962 p. 103) uses Marxist theory to argue that the coming of the capitalist stage of development in Europe brought about the *Öffentlichkeit* (the public sphere) which existed outside of the control by the state. In such a space individuals exchanged views and knowledge via newspapers, journals, reading clubs, Masonic lodges,

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<sup>4</sup> The reigns of Vladimir the Great (980–1015) and his son Yaroslav the Wise (1019–1054) constitute the Golden Age of Kiev, which saw the acceptance of Orthodox Christianity from Byzantium.

and coffeehouses. Habermas argued that the essential characteristic of the *Öffentlichkeit* culture was its "critical" nature characterized by a dialogue either in actual conversation or via the print media. Likewise Habermas also observed that the printing press helped democratize Europe by providing space for discussion and agreement among politically engaged citizens, often before the state had fully democratized. Thus there is a clear link between the public sphere and civil society.

On the other hand, Pipes (2004), an esteemed scholar on the topic of Russia, notes that until 1861 the vast majority of Russians were serfs for whom notions of human rights were unknown and alien. Additionally, the pre-1917 tsarist government punished any attempt by its peasants<sup>5</sup> to interfere in politics or to criticize the establishment. But at the time of the birth of mass communications in the beginning of the twentieth century, Russia continued to be "not free", this time oppressed by the Communist regime. Thus in Russia, just like in other societies with authoritarian regimes, the means of mass communication were always controlled and used by the state (Benkler 2006, p. 176).

Rohozinski, (2000) a doctoral candidate at the University of Cambridge, sums up the situation by positing that historically Soviet officials had an ambiguous relationship with the idea of two-way communication, "reflecting the contradictory needs of officially maintaining central control while seeking private means to personally subvert this same control". Rohozinski, (Ibid.) quotes Stalin who is said to have replied to a call for the creation a modern state telephone system with the following remark: "I can imagine no greater instrument of counter-revolution in our time."<sup>6</sup>

In Russian society, years of tsarist and totalitarian regimes have created a mutual distrust not only between society and the State but also between individual citizens and the State, and amongst the citizens themselves. As a consequence, the creation of extended horizontal links within a society, beyond one's immediate family was prevented (Л.Д. Гудков, 2008). A society was created in which citizens had to adjust to the system to extract needed goods and services instead of cooperating in civil society to challenge state power and improve living conditions.

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<sup>5</sup> In the beginning of the twentieth century 80 percent of the Russian population were involved in agriculture

<sup>6</sup> On February 9, 1937 followers of Lev Trotsky have gathered a seven thousand meeting in New York City. The audience intended to listen to Trotsky over the telephone from Mexico, but the telephone sabotage by the Stalin agents ruined the plans for a live broadcast.

As communications networks were used by the state for the retention of control, personal networks existed primarily for 'blat'. Professor Alena Ledeneva (2009) of the University College London School of Slavonic and East European Studies defines the Russian phenomenon of 'blat' as obtaining goods and services by circumventing the established Soviet distribution system. Interestingly 'blat' was also used for the purchase of books, prohibited 'samizdat' literature, western videotapes and radio equipment through which Russians were able to access prohibited radio stations like the 'Voice of America'. While 'blat' is no longer needed to acquire basic necessities, nepotism and corruption remain a way of life in Russia.

Lev Gudkov (SvobodaNews, 2011), director of Levada Center, discusses the rudiments of the Soviet man still present in modern-day Russians. He concludes that numerous polls point to the fact that it is impossible to say that the Soviet mentality is completely eradicated from the psyche of Russian citizens. While there are areas in society where change has been very significant - the economy, popular culture, information system, consumption, etc. -- many institutions, mainly government institutions, have remained virtually unchanged since Soviet times.

Jukka Pietiläinen (2008) a senior research at Aleksanteri Institute at the University of Helsinki, adds to this thought, by observing that the mass media in Putin's Russia has changed from being a herald for democratic change [as it was under Gorbachev and Yeltsin] back to the role it played under the Soviet rule: the government's propaganda machine.

### **'MANAGED DEMOCRACY'**

Putin's Russia represents an interesting case as far as political science is concerned. It is a country with liberalization without democratization; a country of symbolic elections and real persecution of the opposition; a country where people openly express grievances online but face 'deathly silence' from the government offline in reaction to these grievances. Rebecca MacKinnon (2010), a senior fellow at the New America Foundation, defined the term "networked authoritarianism", as a system where "the average person with Internet or mobile access has a much greater sense of freedom...in ways that weren't possible under classic authoritarianism. At the same time, in the networked authoritarian state there is no guarantee of individual rights and freedoms." Lupis (2007) quotes political scientist and Fulbright scholar

Gordon Hahn, who writes: "Putin's stealth authoritarianism is consciously implemented and constructed so as to be minimal, nearly imperceptible, and thus credibly deniable."

The current US ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul (2001) along with Masha Lipman (2001) defined the term 'managed democracy' as a system with all formal institutions of democracy, "while the real autonomy of those institutions and as a consequence their real capacity to influence the actions of the state are severely limited." Not surprisingly one of the most important institutions of the civil society, a free and independent media that could challenge the establishment, is nonexistent in a system of 'managed democracy'.

Writing about modern Russia, Wegren and Konitzer (2007) conclude that the Putin administration has retained control not only over the national media, business and economy, but also over civil society. In another work, McFaul (2004) and Stoner-Weis (2004) note that "under Putin the actual democratic content has eroded considerably." Putin and his supporters nevertheless assert that "Russian's democratic retreat has enhanced the state's ability to provide for its citizens" (Ibid.), thus reestablishing Russia's *status quo* of a 'welfare state'<sup>7</sup>.

In many respects the Russian Federation is different from the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire, but the country is still 'manually' managed and the role of civil institutions is still very weak. In February 2012, a survey revealed that the respondents believed that the greatest impact on the life of the country had: the president (65%) and government (56%), and the smallest - intelligentsia (13%) and trade unions (9%). These survey results reinforce the notion that Russia's strictly vertical structure of governance does not allow the influence of society on the adoption of key policy decisions.

Just as under the Soviet system, which aimed to manage politics, the economy, and the media, the 'managed democracy' regime cannot allow the presence of an independent media. At the same time, the government controlled media legitimizes the regime and keeps it in power. McFaul (2001) and Lipman (2001) also claim that Putin's ascension to the Presidency is due to his successful campaign in eliminating critical content in the media, without actually eliminating the media outlets, this "represent[ing] the latest and perhaps most consequential phase of consolidating managed democracy in Russia." In another work Hale, McFaul and Colton (2004)

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<sup>7</sup> Putin (2012) writes that "Russia is a social welfare state. We have a much higher level of social guarantees than countries with a comparable level of labor productivity and per capita incomes. In the past few years, spending on the social sphere has accounted for over 50% of overall budgetary spending. In the past four years alone, it has gone up by 50% in absolute terms. Its percentage share of GDP has increased from 21% to 27%."

compare Russia's control over the mass media to that of Latin American authoritarian models. Yet in another work McFaul (2004) compares Russia's path with that of "Angola--an oil-dependent state ...whose leaders seem more intent on maintaining themselves in office to control oil revenues and other rents than on providing public goods and services to a beleaguered population."

Likewise, Adam Przeworski (2004) of the Department of Politics at New York University asserts that dictatorships use force to prevent people from expressing their opposition. Because such regimes rule by force, they are highly vulnerable to any visible signs of dissent, since dissent challenges the dominant force, i.e. the dictator himself. Kricheli, Livne and Magaloni (2011) of Stanford University reach the same conclusion in their research suggesting that while the more repressive dictators *a priori* are less likely to be overthrown by civil protest, they are nonetheless more vulnerable to civil protests.

### **THE INTERNET: THE IDEALIST'S VIEW**

Earl and Schussman (2003, p.162) in *The new site of activism: on-line organizations, movement entrepreneurs, and the changing location of social movement decision*, observe that in a totalitarian regime the work of a watchdog is effectively taken by the public "motivated by individual grievances to undertake social movement activity [relying] on their own skills to conduct their actions". Because the current Russian regime controls the media in order to preserve itself, citizen grievances have moved into areas where the State's control is minimal i.e. online.

This view is also discussed by Yochai Benkler in *The Wealth of Networks* (2006, p.464). He claims that in societies under repressive regimes that control society-wide communications facilities, there still may exist an active public sphere that will necessarily take on political meaning for those who discuss topics in such a sphere. Additionally, the author explains that a Network promises to offer a platform for engaged citizens to cooperate and provide observations and opinions, and to serve as a watchdog over society on a peer-production model. A similar view is supported by Maciel, Roque, and Garcia (2010) who assert that social network sites allow individuals not to meet strangers, but rather enable users to articulate and make viable their social network. Similarly Mary Manjikian an Assistant Professor at the Robertson School of Government (2010) recognizes cyberspace's capacity to mobilize citizens not traditionally involved in political activity across vast geographic expanses. In his analysis,

Boulianne (2009, p.211) finds that “increased access to a large, diverse set of political information may help reinvigorate civic life. The Internet may reduce the costs of participation (time, effort) by increasing the availability of information”.

### **THE INTERNET: THE REALIST’S VIEW**

The Internet, by the virtue of its unique architecture and its speed of proliferation, may hold the potential to liberalize the control of information and subsequently lead to social democratization, especially in states where governments tightly control traditional media. However, its role in the political process should not be overestimated. The view that the Internet will automatically lead to an increase in personal freedoms may be false. Many researchers have focused their attention specifically on Russian society and how the Internet should not be viewed in a vacuum— separate from the public that uses it.

Alexander (2004), a doctoral candidate at Harvard University, claims that it simply may be false to assume that intelligent, educated, and young persons in a country such as Russia will flock to the Internet to find the truth about their government and then use the Internet to spread the truth and mobilize opposition. The same view is expressed by March (2004) whose study indicates that the political use of the Internet is very much defined by the interaction of structure and agency, rather than any mystical ‘democratic’ quality intrinsic to the technology itself. Writing about Russia, Rohozinski (2000) explains that the impact of information technologies is critically shaped by the social context in which they are deployed. The author notes the error of assuming that information technologies are handmaidens of democratic development.

Shirky, (2011) a professor of New Media at New York University, makes an interesting observation that “far more people in the 1500s were reading erotic novels than Martin Luther's ‘Ninety-five Theses’”. Nevertheless such works as the Committees of Correspondence, published prior to the American Revolution, still had an enormous political effect. While Shirky (2011) agrees with the general assumption that the freedom to communicate is good for political freedom in general, he nonetheless (Ibid.) holds more realistic views claiming that the potential of social media lies mainly in the support of civil society and the public sphere. He presents an "environmental" view that positive pro-democratic changes, follow, rather than precede, the development of a strong public sphere. He contends that opinions are first transmitted by the media, and then they get echoed by friends, family members, and colleagues, thus forming political opinions in the public sphere.

Semetko and Krasnoboka (2003) of the University of Amsterdam, point out that along with the Internet's great potential to improve democracy, empower citizens and enable public engagement with politics, it also may be used to widen existing divisions of power in society by creating new gaps between the information haves and have-nots, a so called 'digital divide'.

In support of this view, Lebedeva (2011), a chief of the Information Analysis Division of the Institute of Socioeconomic Studies of the Population of the Russian Academy of Sciences, presents research indicating that half of students in Russia who did not use the Internet had parents without a higher education and as a consequence enjoyed a relatively low per-capita income on average. On the other hand, the study respondents who were most advanced in participating in the information society had more highly educated parents.

Boris Ovchinnikov (2003), a leading expert at the International Institute for Humanities and Political Studies in Moscow, notes that the social composition of the Runet audience is prevalent with persons who are well educated, well-to-do, active, independent have high demands and expectations, and are willing to take risks to achieve their goals. Ovchinnikov (Ibid.) concludes with a thought that the Internet is a "unique environment with an entirely new level of freedom, speed, and pluralism of communication". Ovchinnikov (Ibid.) cautions, however, that the Internet in Russia is actually viewed primarily as a means of entertainment or a source of essential work-related information, but not politics.

As the majority of Runet users are young, McFaul (2002) touches upon the generational differences in Russian society. He concludes that individuals who are younger, better educated, have higher incomes, work in higher-status occupations, and live in more urbanized environments are more likely to favor a democratic regime with its unparalleled access to different sources of media and to the multiple views expressed in them. McFaul (Ibid.) notes that the rich and urban class also enjoys access to the World Wide Web (Appendix D), an immediate window into the West. To some extent, Russia is undergoing a generational conflict. One of the manifestations of this conflict is the dispute between paternalism and private initiative. For decades, the 'Homo Sovieticus' was at the mercy of state paternalism and had neither the capacity nor the right to make decisions of a governmental nature. Russians are now awakening from the Soviet era and post hibernation period. Thus increasingly, a polarization is emerging in Russia between real and virtual communities. While the first comprises the electorate of Prime Minister Putin, with a majority of workers and retirees, the second consists almost entirely of a young, educated and urban population.

### **THE INTERNET AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN RUSSIA**

In Russia, as in other countries, the Internet has developed mostly because of computer amateurs (Rohozinski, 2000) using it for entertainment and communication purposes. But ideas proposed by Frances Cairncross, Nicholas Negrophonte and Francis Fukuyama point out that advances in cheap and accessible telecommunications along with Web 2.0 promulgation have changed the power relations between individuals and institutions, becoming a 'Fifth Estate'. Describing the situation in Russia, Markku Lonkila (2008), at the University of Helsinki, reminds us that the significance of the Internet for activism is amplified by the authoritarian regime of Putin. The situation is exacerbated by the lack of critical public debate on national television and the sheer vastness of the country. The author concludes that online tools are indispensable for disseminating information and communicating among activists, exerting pressure on the authorities, and organizing online and offline demonstrations. The flexibility and speed of communication are a great advantage in blog communication both by computer and mobile phone. She notes that specifically for many young and educated Russians with Internet access, LiveJournal has become an important means of personal expression as well as a tool for social and political activism in recent years.

Etling, Alexanyan, Kelly, Faris, Palfrey, and Gasser (2010) of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, in their comprehensive research on the Russian blogosphere conclude that it meets many of the prerequisites of a networked 'public sphere', as defined by Benkler in *The Wealth of Networks* (Benkler, 2006, p.10-11). The authors note that this is a predominantly peer-produced space, which draws on Web 2.0 resources. Many of the most politically attuned bloggers use the platform to serve as a watchdog on elites and the government. The authors conclude that based on their research, portions of the Runet blogosphere are used not only to discuss politics and criticize the government, but also to mobilize political and social action.

Due to the fungibility<sup>8</sup> of on-line identities it has become easier for mainstream people to express their views at a lower personal cost. However Rimskii (2011) approaches the issue of identities that are formed online from a psychological point of view. He reiterates the ideas expressed by other scholars, who assert that as the Russian state continues to keep its citizens separate from politics, not permitting them to take part in solving strategic and socially

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<sup>8</sup> Online identity is fungible i.e. people can appear as themselves, but can also impersonate others or invent new identities.



significant problems, a noticeable social reaction of many active groups against such treatment has been to discuss politics on the Internet. He then proceeds to explain how online identities that people create for Internet discourse gradually make their way into the real world. This situation often leads to crises because the adaptation of identity lags behind the changes in reality. Such crises have the potential to turn into individual or mass protests. Shirky (2008, p.51) supports this view by writing, "Information sharing produces shared awareness among the participants, and collaborative production relies on shared creation, but collective action creates shared responsibility, by tying the user's identity to the identity of the group".

Garas, Garcia, Skowron and Schweitzer (2012) in their comprehensive report published in *Nature* assert that "the presence of social bonds among users in the chatroom confirms similarities between online and offline communication" thus indicating that online chat activity is not different from other forms of communication.

Manjikian (2010) further argues that the separation between the virtual world and the "real world" is disappearing and is leading to a "spillover" from problems in cyberspace to problems in the real world. Thus the migration of aired grievances from the real world, bypassing traditional media, into the cyber world and back is clearly visible. Manuel Castells has also developed the variety of Marxist urban sociology which emphasizes the role of social movements in postindustrial society. He writes: "Our societies are increasingly structured around the bipolar opposition of the Net and the Self" (Castelas, 1996, p.3).

#### **THE INTERNET AND CIVIL SOCIETY AROUND THE WORLD**

As there are numerous comparisons of the Russian protesters' use of ITCs to similar phenomenon occurring elsewhere across the world, this literature review would fall short without mentioning some of most noteworthy examples.

Shirky (2010b) highlights the case of Philippine President Joseph Estrada who faced a 'Coup de Text' in which numerous text messages pushed him out of power. Rheingold (2003) also points to the 2004 demonstrations in Spain organized via text messages after then Spanish Prime Minister had wrongly accused Basque separatists for the Madrid transit bombings. As a result of these protests, the conservative government lost the elections. In 2009 in Moldova, massive protests against rigged elections were coordinated via text messages, Facebook and Twitter (Shirky 2010b).

Patrick Meier, Director of Crisis Mapping at 'Ushahidi'<sup>9</sup> in his exhaustive research (MEIER, 2011) gives insight on the fact that Egyptian and Sudanese dictatorships were indeed threatened by technology because it challenged the status quo. The author details evidence suggesting that this challenge tipped the balance of power marginally in favor of civil society in Egypt.

In writing about Iranian protests, Howard (2010, p.8) asserts that the citizens were able to get their message out in unprecedented ways thanks to the Internet "which allowed them to organize increasingly larger campaign rallies. Without access to broadcast media, opposition campaigners turned social media applications like Facebook from a minor pop culture element into a major tool of political communication. He concludes that digital technologies enabled "unprecedented activation of weak social ties," which "brought the concerns of disaffected youth, cheated voters, and beaten protesters to the attention of the mullahs". But at the same time Howard (2010, p.9) notes that most Iranians who went to the streets during the protests were not using Twitter and "were responding to both strong and weak network ties and to the digital technologies designed to maintain those ties."

Echoing Howard's thesis, Morozov (2011), a Schwartz fellow at the New America Foundation and an expert on the issues of the Net, writes that the Arab revolts were driven by people who had economic grievances and were politically oppressed. They turned to the Internet to publicize their grievances and proclaim their political resistance. Their use of the Internet probably set a different tempo to the revolts but did not actually inspire them. Morozov (Ibid.) reminds us that the socio-cultural and historical realities of a given country are the variables for a revolution, while technology is a tool that influences the revolution's speed and efficiency. The idea that the rise of the masses in the Arab world was economic and political in its nature is also expressed by Dr. Imtiyaz Yusuf (Yusuf, 2012) of Assumption University, Thailand.

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<sup>9</sup> A non-profit technology company voted by MIT's Technology Review as one of the 50 most innovative companies in the world alongside Facebook, Google and Twitter.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The protests following the 2011 Duma elections in Moscow revealed both the unprecedented numbers of citizens ready to protest against the Putin regime, as well as the role ITCs have begun to play in Russian society. In spite of the warnings of sociologists who documented public grievances, the 'tandem' completely failed to anticipate the magnitude of the actual street protests. But the protests became primarily a proof of irreversible changes in the Russian society. Russian society has turned into a peat bog ready to ignite from any spark.

While this study will rely on a descriptive approach to examine the Moscow protests, this qualitative method will be augmented by quantitative analysis. The study will use the most recent poll data collected by the Russia's leading statistical centers; Levada, Fund Public Opinion as well as the Russia Public Opinion Research Center (WCIOM). Poll results published in Russian were translated by the author.

Secondary sources used in this work come from peer reviewed academic literature and books available online. Taking into consideration the fact that this topic is new and developing, authoritative news sources have been used as well. Suitable sources in other languages were translated by the author and used throughout this work. Where necessary, the author has also used footnotes to explain Russian historical or cultural peculiarities which are crucial for the understanding of the material.

In order to fully comprehend the role that the Internet has played in triggering the December mass protests in Moscow, this paper will first analyze Russian society through the prism of Marxist theory, as a continual struggle of classes. Whereas classic Marxist theory focuses on working class opposition to the bourgeoisie, the theory may be applied to modern Russia where the classes struggle within a corrupt economy that fails to fairly distribute benefits among the citizens. Such corruption directly causes the grievances of the middle class.

When applying Marxist theory, within the context of modern communication technologies, this paper will utilize the writings of Jürgen Habermas. Habermas incorporated the theory of Karl Marx as well as the critical neo-Marxian theory of the Frankfurt School<sup>10</sup> into his own theory of 'communicative action' (1962). This theory claims that a group of people, who take on the tools of open expression, become '*a public*', and the presence of a '*synchronized public*' increasingly

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<sup>10</sup> Represented by Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse

constrains undemocratic rulers while expanding the rights of that public...” (Shirky, 2010). Similarly Nah (2010) of the University of Kentucky expounds on the idea that the communicative action “enables individuals to disseminate knowledge, generate cultures, and build identities, thus integrating the ‘lifeworlds’. As a consequence, the ‘life world’ that is integrated through communicative action...nurtures civil society to grow and develop.”

This capstone project will then trace how, in the absence of other avenues for open discussion, the Moscow middle class moved its conversations about social grievances online. As social networks had helped to coordinate citizens’ efforts in extinguishing the forest fires of 2010 around Moscow (Digest, 2010) one could argue that the Internet started creating a civil society ‘online’, since this was not possible ‘offline’.

Lastly, this paper will use revolutionary theory in analyzing how the grievances of the Moscow middle class that were expressed exclusively on-line for several years, finally spilled onto the streets of the Russian capital. The middle class Muscovites who stepped into the streets were not demanding higher salaries or pensions. Rather, they were calling for justice to safeguard their current lifestyle, being “individuals who have incomes, and modest means, which they [were] in danger of losing” (Goldstone, 1997). McFaul (2002) reminds us that many violent revolutions have happened following a sudden economic downturn after a long period of growth, wherein the rising middle class has led the opposition challenge.

Rimiskii (2011) notes that that the first public manifestations were observed at the turn of the twentieth century and that period is considered to be the beginning of the postmodern era in politics, economy, and public life. Mass manifestations of the postmodern era in developed countries came a few decades later, in the 1960s and 1970s. Rimskii claims that the essence of the postmodern era is the state of radical plurality, the high degree of individualism in the motives, goals, and results of people’s activity.

Once again, when using revolutionary theory in the context of mass protests that rely on ITCs, there needs to be an amalgamation of several theories. In this respect the ‘*resource mobilization theory*’ discussed by Johnson (2000), Jenkins (1983), McCarthy and Zald (1977) is applicable here. This theory was developed from studies of collective action during the 1960s, and gained increasing prominence throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The theory is based on the notion that resources—such as time, money, organizational skills, etc. are critical to the success of social movements. The availability of applicable resources along with the actors’ ability to use them effectively, are critical in social movements. This phenomenon was demonstrated by

student protestors who used Google Maps and mobile phones in London in 2010 (Meier 2010). Resource mobilization theory treats social movements as normal, rational, institutionally rooted activities that are structured and patterned, thus allowing for analysis in terms of organizational dynamics (Buechler, 1993). The same ideas are seen in the research of Charles Tilly. In his study of the French counter-revolution *The Vendée* (1975) he de-emphasized individual pathologies while showing that some degree of formal organization and informal networking is necessary to mobilize communities of protest and structure social movements.

In addition, when comparing the Moscow protests with the Arab Spring events, this study will rely on the theories of 'critical mass' which explain the dramatic switch in political equilibrium. The German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, in *The Spiral of Silence. A theory of public opinion – Our social skin* (1993, p. 97) writes about the development of a "critical mass" of the populace discontented with the authorities. She suggests that the original formation of the early stages of "critical mass" relies on the most motivated and highly educated individuals. At the "snowball phase", they become leaders of the new mass trends (opinion leaders) attracting the passive majority to their side and transforming the society's political mood. Large scale involvement of opposition supporters creates a feeling of relative collective security. As the number of opponents rises, the social balance changes and some members of society are ready to speak out and advance their opposition views.

Similarly, Timur Kuran (1991) professor of Economics and Political Science at Duke University, argues that the most dangerous protests occur when dissatisfaction is spread and the political institutions are highly repressive. Initially, the protest does not directly threaten the regime, but only serves as a signaling function. If during the first stage of protest a critical mass is not reached, the protest dies away. If, on the other hand, the first stage of protest reached this critical mass, then in the second stage additional citizens realize that there is a greater probability that the status quo will be replaced by an alternative regime when the public opposition to the regime reaches a critical level.

Other scholars and theorists have also noted that social movements are greatly enhanced by access to modern information communication technologies, such as mobile telephony, short message service (SMS), email and the World Wide Web, among others "(Walker, 2007, p.4). Kricheli, Livne, Magaloni (2011) have hypothesized that the task of coordinating and orchestrating mass protests in more repressive regimes is significantly harder, which makes civil

protest less likely. The authors claim that not only do the citizens not know who is who; they also do not know how many citizens are satisfied with the regime and vice versa.

But Shirky (2010b) contradicts this idea, claiming that because of new the technologies “larger, looser groups can now take on some kinds of coordinated action, such as protest movements and public media campaigns that were previously reserved for formal organizations.” This view is supported by Garrett (2006, p. 213) who asserts that with ICTs the public can mobilize and engage rapidly taking simultaneous action on multiple fronts, and in multiple ways.

## THE HISTORY OF FREE-SPEECH AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN RUSSIA

In order to understand modern Russia's relationship with civil society and events that might affect that relationship, it is necessary to examine its history before the emergence of the Soviet Union. Richard Pipes (2004), former Director of Eastern European and Soviet Affairs at the US National Security Council wrote:

Before examining what Russians say and think today, it is necessary to look back at Russia's past. Despite its reputation for unpredictability, Russia is a remarkably conservative nation whose mentality and behavior change slowly, if at all, over time, regardless of the regime in power.

### IMPERIAL RUSSIA

Throughout Russia's history the conditions in which civil society or a public sphere could develop have been absent. Unlike Western Europe, there was no feudalism in Russia as there were no feudals who could limit the power of the prince. Rather there were satraps wholly dependent on the prince who owned all the land (Vernadsky, 1939).

The prince's guards, just like the knights in Europe, taxed the peasants. Since in Russia there were no economic conditions that would foster the growth of an independent bourgeoisie, state workers that lived off of the taxes never met any opposition. Under Tsar Ivan the Terrible (Grozni) there were oprichniki<sup>11</sup>, later judges and governors, this parasite cast remaining up until the reforms of Alexander II. The Orthodox Church (which used Church Slavonic language), did not encourage dialogue within the society or the questioning of dogma.

Describing the Russian national identity the Russian historian Vasilii Kluchevsky (1887) wrote:

Now let us imagine the historical personality of the Russian people...a mass of disconnected units many of whom have not grown as adult and responsible people. ...Thus the current regime fits the given territory and its people perfectly well.

Nonetheless the history of Imperial Russia has examples of individual and mass opposition to the established system. These historic events will serve as an appropriate background for a discussion of the freedom of speech and civil society that will later incorporate the role of technology.

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<sup>11</sup> The 'Oprichniki' were responsible for the torture and murder of internal enemies of the Tsar *Ivan IV Vasilyevich* (1530 – 1584), known in English as 'Ivan the Terrible'.

In the era of absolute monarchy few writers who dared to publicly criticize the regime could be Radishchev *the Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* represented a challenge to Catherine's Russia. Being the progenitor of public liberal discourse in Russia, Radishchev was an observer of the ills he saw within society and government. Radishchev's book described serfdom, abuses of the nobility, government and governance, social structure, personal freedom and liberty. Having read the book Catherine, II concluded that Radishev was advocating "the immoral example of contemporary France"<sup>12</sup>. Radishchev was sentenced, first to death and then to ten years of banishment in eastern Siberia whereas his book was banned for more than 100 years (Shemetov, 1974, p.79).

The Decembrist revolt that took place in the capital city of St. Petersburg in 1825 was the first open breach between the government and reformist elements of the Russian nobility.

The deplorable situation in the Russian empire was described by the literary critic Vissarion Belinsky (1936)<sup>13</sup>:

[Russia] now represents a terrible sight of ... a country where, above all, there are no guarantees, not only for the personal honor and property, but not even a police order ... The most vibrant, contemporary national issues in Russia today are the abolition of serfdom... and as far as possible the introduction of strict compliance to the laws that already exist.

One of the most cherished goals of the progressive part of Russian society was the abolition of serfdom and the introduction of the notion of human rights. The abolition of serfdom, however, was necessarily connected to the constitutional limitations of the monarch's powers. The Russian nobility, having been influenced by the ideas of such French philosophers as Voltaire, Russo and Montesquieu could not help but notice Europe's obvious progress in comparison with Russia. Additionally, when in 1812 the primarily young and middle aged men of the Russian nobility victoriously returned from the Napoleonic wars in Europe, they brought liberal ideas and hopes back to Russia where even low rank soldiers were serfs. In the best traditions of the European 'public sphere' these noblemen formed secret societies where they discussed and published ideas considered rather radical (Mazour, 1937).

In December of 1825, thirty Decembrists, by deceit, led 3,000 soldiers against the 12, 000 imperial army. The revolt against the absolute monarchy was brutally suppressed. Despite the

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<sup>12</sup> Referring to the French revolution that took place in 1789–1799

<sup>13</sup> Even though this opinion is dated 1847, the situation is nevertheless accurate



failure of the Decembrists, Tsar Nicholas I was compelled to turn his attention to domestic affairs. Serfdom that had existed for about four hundred years impacting 37 percent of the population was officially abolished in 1861 (Blum, 1964). The Decembrist revolt was radically different from the epoch of palace coups<sup>14</sup> in its revolutionary trajectory. Although defeated, the Decembrists left a huge legacy in the Russian society promulgated by such prominent writers as Pushkin and Lermontov.

Following the Decembrist revolt, Russia's autocracy continued for almost a century but as it was unable to solve the most pertinent economic and social questions, it unintentionally led the country towards a revolutionary scenario. Ideas that were born in the midst of the highly educated Russian nobility slowly penetrated larger parts of the society.

In pre-revolutionary Russian culture intellectuals began to advocate the concern for the fate of their country, the desire for social criticism, and the issues that hinder national development. Russian philosophers and the intelligentsia were determined primarily by the opposition to the official government with the terms "educated class" and "intellectuals" were partly separated. A critical attitude to the tsarist government determined the sympathy of the Russian intelligentsia to the liberal and socialist ideas (Blum, 1964).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, many educated Jewish<sup>15</sup> youth subjected to discriminatory policies by successive Russian tsars took an active leadership role in the revolutionary movement (Rothman and Lichter, 1982). In the absence of the Internet or TV, newspapers served as a political tool to mobilize the masses. Vladimir Lenin said at the start of the Russian revolution, that the media should serve to "educate, mobilize and agitate" Curry (2010). Due to censorship, *Iskra*<sup>16</sup> the official organ of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, managed by Lenin, was published in Stuttgart, Munich, Geneva and London. Using German funds Lenin also published another propaganda newspaper-'Pravda' (the truth).

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<sup>14</sup> Historian Kluchevski (1887), (author of the term) dates the epoch of the palace coups as 1725 – 1801. Seizure of the political power via the palace coups. The reason for this was the absence of definite rules of the inheritance of the throne, coupled with infighting among members of the court who were aided by the regiments.

<sup>15</sup> Fearing a large intellectual proletariat Nicholas I kept the number of university students at 3,000 per annum.

<sup>16</sup> *Iskra's* motto was "Из искры возгорится пламя" ("From a spark a fire will flare up") — a line from the reply Alexander Odoyevsky wrote to the poem by Pushkin addressed to Decembrists imprisoned in Siberia

The Russian scholar Senokosov, wrote that “The bourgeois-democratic revolution that started in Russia at the beginning of the XX century ... was interrupted in 1917 (Л.Д. Гудков, ПОСТСОВЕТСКИЙ ЧЕЛОВЕК И ГРАЖДАНСКОЕ ОБЩЕСТВО, 2008). This interruption was brought about by the coup d'état later promulgated as the ‘Great October Socialistic Revolution’ of the working class, which established the dictatorship of the Communist Party as well as the formation of a new country-the Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics. However, communist leaders, just like the tsars before them were not elected by a popular vote, but rather appointed by the party elite, upon the death of the ‘dear leader’.

Centuries of autocratic regimes have certainly affected the Russian ‘collective unconscious’ identity. There are numerous Russian colloquial phrases that refer to a futile fight against the system (sistema): ‘one is not a warrior’ (odin v pole ne voin); ‘don't complicate life to yourself or others’ (ne uslojnayj jizn sebe i drugim), ‘whip will not cut the axe handle’ (pletyu obuha ne pererubesh), ‘don't seek problems’ (ne lez' na rozhon), ‘don't run in front of the train’ (ne begi vperedj parovoza), ‘don't lead an unnecessary confrontation’ (ne obostryaj tam gde eto ne nado), ‘do not fight with a strong one, do not go to court with a wealthy one’ (s silnim ne deris, s bogatim ne sudis) and many others.

### **THE USSR: Collapse from within**

In reality, the rule of the Communists merely replaced the oppression and censorship of the Romanovs but to a much greater degree through an oppressive and propagandistic machine. Gene Sharp in his book *From Dictatorship to Democracy* notes: “Aristotle warned long ago that “. . . tyranny can also change into tyranny. . .” There is ample historical evidence from France (the Jacobins and Napoleon), Russia (the Bolsheviks)...and elsewhere ...”

In the USSR any social movement was imposed on the society by the state and it had to support the Communist party line with the party-appointed leaders. Any dissident or independent thinking was considered as a threat to the established system and was immediately suppressed. In so doing the Soviet state ventured to create a new breed of man-‘homosoveticus’ (Zinovyev, 1986). Nevertheless the Soviet Union always had individual dissidents who were brave enough to stand up to the oppressive regime, risking imprisonment in psychiatric institutions or even execution. Lev Gumilev, Anna Akhamatova, and Alexandr Soljenitsin were among the few fearless dissidents. On a mass scale such attempts led to an inevitable brutal suppression.

Hence the vast majority of Soviet people had to adapt to living in a dual reality. Outwardly people paid lip service to the regime while inwardly they were maneuvering within the system via informal networks-‘blat’. Lev Gudkov, calls the average Soviet citizen a “hypocrite slave” (Л.Д. Гудков, ПОСТСОВЕТСКИЙ ЧЕЛОВЕК И ГРАЖДАНСКОЕ ОБЩЕСТВО, 2008). The Soviet citizens accepted a social contract: they received a ‘share’ in the greatness of the motherland with her military might, spaceships and sport triumphs. In return they declined to take part in the political decisions, agreed on limitations and shortages. During the Leonid Brejnev years of stagnation, officially, Soviet citizens opposed Western capitalism, while inwardly many craved the consumer benefits and personal freedoms of that same Western society. When Western radio stations were jammed, the official Soviet media was regarded by many citizens with irony and skepticism. Some citizens also read photocopied manuscripts (samizdat) of prohibited authors like Soljenitsin, Bulgakov or Brodsky. Dissident Vladimir Bukovsky (1978, p.126) defined samizdat as “(...) *I myself create it, edit it, censor it, publish it, distribute it, and ... get imprisoned for it.* But unlike the Internet and TV, samizdat was circulated among the population in only a very limited way, and only *intelligentsia* discussed dissident topics in Soviet kitchens.

Nevertheless the birth of the Russian middle class can be traced to the Soviet era when the foundations for consumer society were laid. The spread of higher education combined with a rise in consumer consumption created the preconditions for the development of the influential middle class. Its emergence might have contributed to the breakdown of the Communist system that had been established in a completely different era, in a country with a predominantly rural and illiterate population (Belanovsky, 2011).

Michael Gorbachev aspired to do in public what Nikita Khrushchev had done behind the closed doors of the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress<sup>17</sup>. In 1986 General Secretary Gorbachev ventured to open discussions on the imperfections of the Soviet system, trying to modernize it. Perhaps Gorbachev overestimated the system’s strength and flexibility. In a system built on so much corruption, secrecy and lies it was impossible to openly discuss internal imperfections.

However, with the advent of Glasnost (freedom of speech) and Perestroika (rebuilding) Soviet citizens for the first time were able to experience what it meant to live in a civil society. They finally heard with their ears what they were afraid to discuss in public. Shirky (2011) observes

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<sup>17</sup> When Khrushchev exposed the Stalin’s cult of the personality (February 1956)

that with the spread of media such as photocopiers or web browsers, “a state accustomed to having a monopoly on public speech finds itself called to account for anomalies between its view of events and the public's.” Glasnost led the Soviet parliament to discuss poignant matters and masses of people followed those discussions on TV and in newspapers with great interest. Never before in Soviets’ lives, had media reports coincided so much with what they observed daily in their lives. In the USSR revelations about past crimes and present faults were received with abhorrence. People started to lose faith in the system they were asked to rebuild.

As Article 6<sup>18</sup> of the USSR Constitution was abolished in March of 1990, dissent was legalized. But the Soviet system needed an ideology just like tsarist Russia needed the Orthodox Church to legitimize its existence. Igor Klyamkin (2011) vice-president of the think tank “Liberal Mission” observes that:

In Russia *force* always had the primary role. Faith and law only masked and upheld that core of the Russian state. Until 1917 force was legitimized by religion, after by the communist ideology.

Likewise, the French historian, and president of the think-tank Saint-Simon Foundation, Francois Furet in *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (1999, p. 438 ) writes, “The death of the Leader [Stalin] reemphasized the *paradox* of a [Soviet] system ...so dependent on a single person that, when he died, the *system* lost something essential.”

One of the essential elements of this ‘system’ was the high level of repressive suppression that in various forms was conducted by the state against society. Because “Détente became for the Kremlin a substitute for domestic economic, financial, and political reforms” (Zubok, 2008) when the world oil prices plunged in 1987, the Soviet Union began to fall into demise.

## **1991 and Beyond**

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, “Russia endured one of the most dramatic and prolonged economic recessions in modern history” McFaul (2002). It remained the largest

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<sup>18</sup> Article 6 of the 1977 USSR Constitution read: "The leading and guiding force of Soviet society, the nucleus of its political system, government and public organizations, is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. [...]"

country in the world with the majority of its industry obsolete, while its gigantic infrastructures and telecommunication networks were in need of modernization. A complicating factor was that Russia had inherited an economic model that heavily relied on imports and sales of hydrocarbons that by the 1980s were more than 62 percent of its total hard currency earnings (Makarova, 2008).

The intractability of Russia's recession could not but negatively affect the middle class. Despite the presence of many political parties, independent TV channels and newspapers, the hurriedly carried-out privatization of state assets left many people in poverty (McFaul, 2002, p. 53). Thus the word 'democracy' came to be associated with criminal plundering of the country, lawlessness and lack of moral standards in the media.

In August 1991 there was a futile attempt on the part of the hardline members of the Communist Party to restore the Soviet regime by eliminating Gorbachev's Glasnost and Perestroika. This conservative faction of the Politburo considered that the Soviet-style coup d'état was still possible. While vacationing, Gorbachev, was announced to be gravely ill—just like Khrushchev in 1964, the public was to remain calm and watch state TV that proceeded to broadcast the ballet *Swan Lake*. Publication of critical newspapers was immediately suspended.

But the 'State Committee of the State of Emergency' had not taken into consideration two important factors. First, they overestimated the role of state TV. Many Muscovites were aware of the official TV bias and swiftly switched to other sources of information including liberal radio stations. Fax machines and the first ever e-mails became the new communication platforms that allowed people in this totalitarian state to proclaim their rights and protect their newly found freedoms. Secondly, many people, having learned the truth about the history of the Communist Party did not want to return to a society oppressed by a dictatorship regime. Common Muscovites marched to the Russian Parliament in solidarity with the democracy proponent Boris Yeltsin. The army did not dare to follow the orders of the Vice President Genady Yanayev and the Soviet people prevailed in protecting Boris Yeltsin and the 'democracy' he represented to them (Åslund, 2007, p.96).

Throughout this history we have seen that freedom of speech, a real public sphere, or civil society never existed in tsarist Russia or in the USSR in the true sense. As Aron (2012), resident scholar and director of Russian studies at the American Enterprise Institute puts it, "Ideologies have changed like the draperies in the windows but the fundamental nature has

remained the same". This reflects the trajectory of the development of post-Soviet Russia as it embraced the 'managed democracy'.

### **PUTIN'S RUSSIA: *PANEM ET CIRCENSES*<sup>19</sup>**

As Yeltsin's health deteriorated so did the state of Russian affairs. At a time when the Russian people yearned for a strong leader, the Yeltsin family had other concerns. McFaul (2000) writes:

The simple explanation goes like this: Putin was chosen by Yeltsin and his band of oligarchs as a loyal successor who would keep them out of jail and preserve the existing system of oligarchic capitalism, in which oligarchs make money not by producing or selling goods and services but by stealing from the state.

But Russian history also explains the birth of the Putin regime. Historically the Russian public has had an innate longing for a strong and just paternal figure, so well described by the Russian adjective *groznyj*, meaning 'awesome' (Pipes, 2004). Thus Vladimir Putin with his 'vertical power' concept fit well into this paradigm.

In order to understand the current autocratic regime of Vladimir Putin and the events that have happened within it, it is necessary to examine his extraordinary rise to power from obscurity. Vladimir Putin moved to Moscow from St. Petersburg only in 1996 to work in the Presidential Property Management Department and in 1998 he was already appointed director of the FSB (former KGB). When Russia was shocked by the violent apartment building explosions in Moscow in August 1999, the authorities immediately accused Chechen separatists. Yeltsin appointed hitherto publicly unknown Vladimir Putin as the prime minister and Putin reaffirmed Russia's readiness to crush the terrorists (Satter, *Darkness at Dawn: The Rise of the Russian Criminal State*, 2004, p.132). McFaul et al. (Henry, 2004) write that "[Putin] benefited enormously from the rally-around –the –leader effect after the terrifying bombing of two Moscow apartment buildings in September 1999. But he also possessed charisma of sorts."

Nevertheless, ten months before the presidential elections, Putin's approval rating still stood at a meager 2 percent. In order to boost Putin's popularity, a close associate of the Yeltsin family, oligarch Boris Berezovsky used his ORT TV channel to portray him as a decisive figure. Lupis (2007) quotes media analyst Anna Kachkayeva who asserted that "Putin is a television president, he was unknown and his image was created by media technology, that's how he came to power".

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<sup>19</sup> (Latin) Bread and Circuses or bread and games

When Yeltsin stepped down on December 31, 1999, Putin assumed the role of acting president. On March 26, 2000, Putin easily won the Presidential elections with 56 percent of the votes in the first round<sup>20</sup>.

## THE MASS MEDIA

Although Vladimir Putin referred to the disintegration of the USSR as the “biggest geopolitical tragedy of the twentieth century” (Shearman, 2009), he openly proclaimed his commitment to democratic reforms initiated by Yeltsin when elected president.

In reality though, Putin gradually started to change the way Russian politics functioned. He saw a clear weakness of the Russian state in the inability of the executive branch to conduct necessary reforms. According to (Colton, 2007) Putin’s logic can be summarized in a pair of oft-repeated phrases: *ukrepleniye gosudarstva* “strengthening of the state” and *upravlyayemaya demokratiya* “managed democracy”.

Putin had a so called ‘tacit agreement’ with the Russian people: he would bring a return to a normal life economically and restore a ‘social welfare state’ (Putin, Government of the Russian Federation, 2012) where possible, while the Russian people would, by their non-opposition, allow him to restrict certain freedoms that he considered to be a hindrance to Russia’s way back to its former glory.

In August 2000, four months into his presidency, the Russian nuclear submarine Kursk mysteriously sank in the Barents Sea. Putin was viciously criticized on ORT TV for not saving sailors’ lives. As a result, his popularity rating fell 10 percent. This was the first and the last open criticism of the Putin regime by the mass media belonging to the Yeltsin-era ‘oligarchs’- Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky-- businessmen who had grown rich in the chaos of privatization. Perhaps, it was at this very moment in time that Putin realized that in order to stay in power, he needed to control the media that had brought him that power. Pietilainen (2008) notes that an immediate result of Russia’s market reforms was the rapid collapse of newspaper circulation and as a consequence a transformation of the country from a newspaper-reading to a television-watching nation. Therefore Putin saw the national television network as the most powerful weapon and decided that’s what the government should control.

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<sup>20</sup> four years later, was re-elected with a landslide majority of 71 percent

Therefore in September of 2000 President Putin introduced “The Information security doctrine”. Under its terms freedom of information was subordinated to the needs of the national security (Burrett, 2011, p.51). The doctrine empowered the state to keep certain information out of the news.

In order to control what the public saw and, mold their perceptions, the Kremlin regained control over the three most viewed TV channels, the ORT, RTR and NTV through both legal and illegal means. Forced to sell his share of ORT, Boris Berezovsky had to relocate to London; Gusinsky having lost NTV immigrated to Israel.

Thus through television, the modern day ‘propaganda machine’, Putin has been molded into the country’s most vibrant and potent politician without having to face anyone who could shadow his image. As a result of Putin’s media takeover, federal TV channels and newspapers commenced reporting Kremlin prepared and approved materials. Regional TV channels and newspapers alike follow the lead in exercising the Soviet style self-censorship.

However, while television media is strictly censored in Putin’s ‘managed democracy’ there has been no attempt to encumber information networks such as satellite programs or cellphones. Neither has there been an attempt to conduct the ‘first generation’ technical filtering of the Internet. The reason is that public TV has served as the sole most important news source<sup>21</sup> for the vast majority of the Russian public.

But the system of ‘managed democracy’ could not but negatively affect basic freedoms in Russia. According to the 2010 US State Department report on Russia (BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR, 2011) the government controls many media outlets, infringes on freedoms of speech and expression pressures major independent media outlets to abstain from critical coverage, and has harassed and intimidated some journalists into practicing self-censorship. Pal, Dutta, and Roy (2011) present evidence that a freer media enhances political participation and also provides an inexpensive way of for the public to express mass grievances, both of which should work towards reducing ethnic, religious and social conflict.

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<sup>21</sup> 84 percent of the Russian population watches TV daily (5 percent read Internet editions). 94 percent of the population learns of current events on TV (Internet 9 percent). Even young Muscovites for whom the Internet is as close as TV as a source of information (64 percent and 74 percent, respectively) go to the Internet for light entertainment and come back to TV for fresh news («ЛЕВАДА ЦЕНТР», 2011).



Research by media experts demonstrates the degree to which the three main television channels promote the Kremlin's interests. Lupis (2007) mentions an analysis conducted in early 2006 by the Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations in which it was revealed that about 90 percent of the political news coverage on the Russian TV three channels focuses on the government's work in a positive or neutral way, while about 4 percent of the coverage focused on the opposition and mainly in a negative way.

According to the Freedom House 'Freedom of the Press Index' Russia is not free. In a ranking of countries according to degree of freedom of the press (Freedom of the Press), Russia has moved from 147th to 179th place, sharing it with Iraq, Venezuela and Chad (PRESS FREEDOM INDEX 2011-2012). Reporters Without Borders conclude that Russia continues to have a gloomy media freedom panorama and that "impunity is still the rule for those who murder or attack journalists. ..." (Ibid.).

This fact, however, is changing. A recent survey by TNS Gallup Media (TNS) reported that television viewers are becoming older (45 years and older), and are more likely to be women. Younger, well-to-do urban professionals are increasingly turning away from broadcast television to other kinds of media: the Internet, glossy magazines and cable or satellite television. For example, during the Nord-Ost incident at a theater in Moscow in 2002, in which an estimated 300 Russians died; and the Beslan school hostage crisis, in which as many as 500 died, the limited coverage of the events by the national television channels led many Russians to seek information on news websites and the independent Moscow radio station Ekho Moskvyy. This situation reflects the earlier Soviet-era of media communications with the "contradictory needs of officially maintaining central control while seeking private means to personally subvert this same control" (Rohozinski 2000).

The Russian state, like other authoritarian regimes, has developed a state-centered approach towards the Internet, primarily to use the Web as a means of preserving the legitimacy of the political system. The Russian authorities' approach is also utilitarian: the Web is a means to an end, contributing to the growth of the Russian economy without threatening the established political and social stability of the country.

However, OpenNet Initiative<sup>22</sup> (ONI) argues that Russia and other CIS countries engage, in subtle second and third generation control over the Internet, marked by attempts to engage and shape cyberspace through paid bloggers especially during times of heightened political tensions

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<sup>22</sup> ONI's mission is to identify and document Internet filtering and surveillance, and to promote and inform wider public dialogues about such practices. <http://opennet.net/>

(Bruce Etling, 2010). Additionally, the government requires Internet service providers to install a device that routes all customer traffic to an FSB terminal. Some bloggers were also investigated or charged for their Internet postings based on extremely broad definitions of prohibited activities, such as 'extremism' or inciting hatred, and libel; as well as for comments that others post on their blogs. In April 2009, authorities issued warnings to mass information Internet sites against negative coverage of government news ( US Department of State).

## **THE ECONOMY**

Under Putin, Russia has started a gradual "transform[ation] from an anemic and essentially bankrupt charity case into a robust energy superpower with restored political muscle" (Goldman 2008, p. 130). Many attribute this new found Russian power to the personal character traits of Vladimir Putin who has unified the country under the banner of rebuilding previous glory and bringing "millions [out of the] penury in the 1990s" (Kramer, 2011).

McFaul et al. observe (Henry, 2004)that:

Putin managed during his first term to carry a series of economic reforms that one Western observer called 'far more liberal than anything that could have been cooked up at the most radical think tank in Washington'.

Others attribute Russia's success story to the increased price of raw materials and primary commodities, taking into consideration that they constitute 85 percent of Russia's total exports. Oil, for example, provides two thirds of Russia's exports and half of all federal revenues. From 2000 to 2011 the price of oil went from 27 USD per barrel to 116 USD thus enabling Russia to repay its debts to create a national stabilization fund and spend billions rebuilding social services (Central Intelligence Agency).

The World Bank reported that Russia's gross domestic product (GDP) increased by an average of 6.2 percent annually 2001 through 2006; the real disposable income of the population increased by 11.2 percent per year from 2002 to 2006 (Colton, 2007). The average nominal salary in Russia climbed up from \$80 in 2000 to \$640 per month in 2008 and \$750 USD in 2010 (World Bank, 2009). According to the Moscow department of Economic Policy and Development the average salary in Moscow in 2011 was 16 thousand dollars per year. In Russia proper it is slightly more than 9 thousand (Newsru, 2012).

### THE MIDDLE CLASS

According to Marxist and Revolutionary theories, in order for a mass protest to be successful there must be a class willing to engage in acts of dissent in an effort to safeguard or improve its quality of life.

Economic growth has allowed for a considerable growth in consumer spending and saving, thus establishing a new Russian middle class from the core of the Soviet-era middle class that was severely undermined by the turbulence of the 1990's.

Vladimir Putin has characterized (Putin, Russia muscles up – the challenges we must rise to face, 2012) the Russian middle class that sprang up during his tenure as:

[Individuals, whose] incomes allow them a certain freedom in what they choose to spend and what to save, what to buy and how to spend their holidays. They can afford to be choosy over where they work and have some savings under their belt. Lastly, the middle classes are people who can choose politics. As a rule, their education is such that they can take a discriminating attitude to candidates rather than "voting with their heart." In short, the middle classes have begun shaping their real demands in various fields.

After the protests in Moscow, many western commentators started using the term "Russian middle class" in reference to the protesters. It is the opinion of the author that some clarification as to the actual existence of the middle class needs to be made, since in Russia this term is quite elusive and misleading.

A large-scale study of Russian society "Russian society as it is" (2011, p. 201) which was conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, indicated that 59 percent of Russia's population was poor.

*The Middle Classes in Russia: Economic and Social Strategies* (Maleva, 2008) used the following criteria to define the middle class:

- A. Economic security, including current income, savings, movable and real properties, farming assets- 21.2 percent of households qualified.
- B. Socio-professional criterion (higher education, regular employment, non-physical labor, managerial positions including small-sized entrepreneurs and excluding executives of middle-sized and large companies) - 21.9 percent of respondents qualified.
- C. Self-identification criterion – average for different scales of social identification for households and individuals- 39.5 percent of households qualified

In 2000, 20 percent of the Russian population was referred to as middle class by matching at least two of the abovementioned criteria, with 6.9 percent matching all three criteria.

Elena Avraamova (2002) of the Institute for Social and Economic Problems of the Population of the Russian Academy of Sciences, defined the middle class as having: “economic security, professional capacity, adaptability, and access to and use of technology, political involvement, lifestyle and self-identification.” In studies conducted after 2005, Avraamova refers to the middle class as every fourth family in Russia (2008). At the same time, a 2010 joint study by the Center for Strategic Research and the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (Sergei Belanovsky, 2011), defined 29 percent of the population as the middle class.

With the growth of disposable income, the population has started to travel abroad, a freedom and luxury previously unimaginable for many Soviet people. According to the Levada Center’s poll («ЛЕВАДА ЦЕНТР», 2011) thirty-four percent of all respondents said that they could afford to go on a vacation abroad. Twenty-five percent of those polled have already travelled abroad. Another study by the Levada Center (Л.Д. Гудков, МОЛОДЕЖЬ РОССИИ, 2011) revealed that among young people (18 to 25 years old) one third have been abroad personally, 40 percent have parents who have been abroad (in Moscow 60 percent had been abroad, and more than half of those surveyed had parents living in Moscow.) Thirty percent of the young people had the ability to speak foreign languages. The availability of disposable income has also allowed people to purchase technological gadgets such as cellphones, satellite dishes and computers, as well as to connect to the Internet. Residents of Moscow enjoyed greater economic rewards during the Brejnev era as well as the Putin tenure than the rest of the country. As a consequence more families in Moscow can be attributed to the middle class.

## **THE SPREAD OF THE INTERNET IN RUSSIA**

The Internet has been gradually developing on its own in Russia since 1991. There are different estimates as to the actual number of Internet users in Russia, but from 2002 to 2011 the number has grown from approximately six percent (Appendix G) to an estimated forty percent.

<sup>23</sup> The Fund Public Opinion predicts that by 2014 the number of Internet users in Russia will

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<sup>23</sup> Analytical center Levada in its report indicates that 62percent of Russians (18 years up) do not use Internet. Fund Public Opinion claims that only 43percent of Russians are Internet users, indicating thus that 57percent are not on-line. Taking into account the statistical error the two reports, it is safe to conclude that their data is closely related, thus bringing the number of Russian Internet users to about 40percent («ЛЕВАДА ЦЕНТР», 2011).

grow to 80 million people or 71 percent of the population over eighteen years of age” (Фонд "Общественное мнение", 2011).

Quantitatively speaking, the Moscow metropolitan area, which encompasses 12.2 percent of the country’s population, includes 26.3 percent of all Runet users. Sixty-six percent of the residents of the capital are online (Фонд "Общественное мнение", 2011). Muscovites are also among the most active population segment (40-50 percent) using the Internet to write about political, social and economic topics. Interestingly, the Russian Internet audience is changing from using the Web mainly in the workplace to residential usage. Additionally more and more people are using wireless devices to access the Internet.<sup>24</sup>

When it comes to demographics, there has been a significant increase in the number of older adults aged 35 to 44 using the Internet. This age group is using it less for entertainment and more for reading analytical information.

The development of information technology was one of the five national priorities President Dmitri Medvedev set forth in 2009. His concept, which supported not only better access to information networks, but also promoted a participatory approach, called for a change in the relationship between government and society. This allowed Medvedev to enable a transformation in the mode of governance of Russia, among other things, bypassing a notoriously corrupt civil service.

An adept Ipad user, Medvedev set a personal example in promoting new technologies by publishing regular videos in his blog and using Twitter. In May 2010, nearly 40 percent of regional governors administered a blog, though they are still relatively poorly attended.

## **HOW THE INTERNET IS USED**

The Internet audience’s interest in politics can be measured through the statistics of site visits. Among the rating of fifty sites in [www.top100.rambler.ru](http://www.top100.rambler.ru), politics occupies one of the last spots

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<sup>24</sup> According to research project "Mobile Internet in Russia", conducted by Fund Public opinion (FOM) in 2011, 88 percent of the monthly audience used Internet at home, while 21 percent were accessing the network from work. The main growth in household connectivity is due to the wireless modems, the proportion of people using this method of access is about 16 million people or 13percent of the population (Фонд Общественное Мнение , 2011).

according to the number of visits<sup>25</sup>. By comparison, websites offering various services (social networks, mailing service, and blogs) regularly attract 15 million visitors per day or 73 percent of the daily audience. Various mass media websites attract more than 3.5 million online visitors or 17percent. According to the Levada center (Л.Д. Гудков, МОЛОДЕЖЬ РОССИИ, 2011) Russia's young people use the Internet as a source of information more actively than any other group of society. The younger and more educated the population, the more active they are online. Forty-percent of all Russians online do not participate in social networks, but among 16-20 year-olds only 7 percent do not. But overall, more than 60 percent of urban youth do not discuss political issues in cyberspace (Appendix B).

## **SOCIAL NETWORKS**

Some experts have not hesitated to write about the opposition between a "TV Nation and a Web nation" in Russia. As reminded by Earl and Schussman (2003, p.162) citizens "motivated by individual grievances to undertake social movement activity [rely] on their own skills to conduct their actions." During the fires of summer 2010 or the terrorist attack in Domodedovo airport, television remained the heart of a media landscape closely controlled by the authorities. Reports showing Vladimir Putin in dialogue with the population in the affected areas were covered widely on television, while the initiatives of bloggers were never mentioned in the reports.

In discussing the initiatives of the bloggers writing about the forest fires of 2010, Anatoli Chubais (Свинаренко, 2012) observed:

This is the absolutely new quality of social consciousness. It shows every indication that the country has changed! In my understanding, this change means that as a result of economic reforms the country has seen a fundamental change in social structure.

Overall, Russia ranks second in the world when it comes to the number of blogs, and the Russian language is the 9th most used language online—a designation that it shares with French. Since 2008 the number of blogs on the Runet rose from 3.8 to 7.4 million.

Social networking, instant messaging and the search for information on the mobile Internet is comparable to Internet communication in general despite the still relatively low prevalence of mobile Internet usage. Thus, among all Internet users, social networking is the second most common activity after searching for information.

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<sup>25</sup> About 4 percent of the daily audience and 0.6percent of the population of Russia

In 2011, the Russian Public Opinion Research Center reported a substantial increase in the number of Russians who use social networking sites every day (from 30 to 36 percent). The overall population of Internet users who are registered on social websites rose to 82 percent, while in 2010 the figure was only 52 percent. According to the same research, the typical social media user is a person aged 18-24 (96 percent), with a high level of income (87percent) who is most likely to live in either Moscow or Saint-Petersburg (94 percent). The number of Russians who use foreign social websites like Facebook and Twitter has grown dramatically (from 5 to 18 percent and from 2 to 9 percent, respectively). However, the most popular social websites in Russia are Odnoklassniki (73 percent of Internet users) and V Kontakte (62 percent). The third most popular social website is Moimir which has seen an increase in users (from 22 to 31 percent).

## **CORRUPTION**

Christopher Walker, a director of studies at Freedom House (Walker, 2011) writes that in democratic countries the role of free speech in general and media in particular is that of a watchdog guarding civil liberties, preventing corruption and advocating for transparency. But a free press was seen by the Soviet-trained authoritarian leaders as a threat rather than a boon, and they have made control of the media sector a core element of government strategy in maintaining power. In the most repressive regimes, the limitation of the flow of information has blocked the release of societal pressures and allowed serious problems to fester, threatening long-term stability.

Thus in Russia, where there is no functioning democratic mechanisms to preventing political corruption-- i.e. checks and balances and no free media to expose political and economic corruption, the situation has been worsening dramatically under Putin.

Alex Lupis (2007) Senior Program Coordinator for Europe & Central Asia, Committee to Protect Journalists, observes that cheerful news reports about Putin's successes stand in unambiguous contrast to widespread crime and corruption – in government, schools, hospitals and the military – and have unforeseen consequences on society. McFaul (2004) explains that the reemergence of Russian autocracy under Putin has coincided with economic growth but not caused it. Nevertheless Putin's centralization of power has had negative effects on governance and economic growth.

In their independent expert report "Putin: What 10 Years of Putin Have Brought," (Vladimir Milov, 2010) opposition activists Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Milov claim that during the Putin

regime, theft by officials has reached a catastrophic level. Similarly Transparency International estimates the monetary value of the “corruption market” in Russia at \$300 billion, which equals one quarter of the country’s GDP. In 2011 Russia stood at 143<sup>rd</sup> place as far as corruption was concerned (CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX 2011). According to RosStat- Federal State Statistics Service (Federal State Statistics Service) the number of crimes recorded under the category “Corruption” rose by 87percent between 2000 and 2009 – from 7,000 to 13,000. Anders Aslund, a Senior Fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, European Parliament (2008) in a speech before the European People’s Party, mentioned a common practice of kickbacks of 50 percent on major infrastructure projects of Gazprom. According to the Ease of Doing Business Index, Singapore ranks at first place, while Russia is 120th. Many investors confirm that Russia is a solid block when it comes to corruption, with rampant bribery at all levels. Miriam Elder of The Guardian (Elder, The hell of Russian bureaucracy, 2012) draws the conclusion that the Soviet system began corroding society in Soviet times, turning into a non-functioning corrupt bureaucratic nightmare that now has the added bonus of wheedling itself into the private sector.

An editorial in The Washington Post (Editorial, 2011) explains how the Putin regime of liberalization without democratization is solidified by corruption:

[Under] Mr. Putin ...business and the state have become one, and favored apparatchiks<sup>26</sup> gain enormous wealth. As a key to understanding Putinism, this may be the most important difference: Soviet officials did not have Swiss bank accounts, London townhouses or Riviera estates.

## THE UNPRECEDENTED PROTESTS

This paper’s hypothesis is that the Internet served an instrumental role in helping to inspire the unprecedented protests of Moscow’s ‘middle class’ in late 2011 as well as providing a means of communication and organization for the protesters. As resource mobilization theory stipulates, for an act of protest to be successful there must be a tool. The theory is based on the notion that resources are critical to the success of social movements. This is why, for example, the revolutionaries tried to take over radio stations in the 1930s--so they could broadcast information to the masses.

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<sup>26</sup> Soviet bureaucrat



The Moscow protestors used the Internet's logistical capabilities to quickly organize a mass protest via social networks and blogs, mainly LiveJournal and Facebook.<sup>27</sup> As Shirky (2010b) observes "larger, looser groups can now take on some kinds of coordinated action, such as protest movements and public media campaigns that were previously reserved for formal organizations."

This paper has already addressed the issue of the Internet's permeation of Russian society which has grown in reverse correlation to the censorship of other official media. Next it is imperative to examine the root causes of the Russian public's growing dissatisfaction with the economic and social situation that has progressively deteriorated since 2008. The social composition of the protestors also deserves examination. Finally, this paper will conclude with a comparison of the Arab Spring revolts and the Moscow protests to reveal possible parallels and obvious differences.

#### **THE GRIEVANCES OF THE MIDDLE CLASS**

Hamlet's timeless words "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" corresponds well with Sergey Brin's expression 'Nigeria with Snow' when referring to modern Russia.

Nicholas Eberstadt, (2011) the Henry Wendt Chair in Political Economy at the American Enterprise Institute and a Senior Adviser at the National Bureau of Asian Research writes that:

In effect, Russia stands as a new and disturbing wonder in today's globalized world: a society characterized by high levels of schooling but low levels of health, knowledge, and education.

The prevailing general situation was described by Foreign Policy magazine (Elder, Russian Revolution? No Thanks., 2011) as follows:

A creeping dissatisfaction appears to be setting in; unemployment and inflation remain high, while corruption has become a way of life.

A March 2011 poll conducted by the Levada Center found that 34 (Россияне об акциях протеста и прошедших выборах, 2011) percent of Russians thought the mass protests disturbing Cairo could be possible in Russia too. A poll by the Public Opinion Foundation, found that the unprecedented 49 percent of Russians were so dissatisfied with the regime that they were ready to go out and protest.

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<sup>27</sup> The organizers and participants in the December mass events showed a preference for Facebook influenced by the news that the FSB had demanded that opposition groups be blocked on Vkontakte.

Since Russia has a 'soft authoritarian regime', the leader's approval rating is *a priori*, closely related to the satisfaction with the regime he has instituted. As a consequence, in April 2011 Vladimir Putin's approval rating, which for more than four years had not dropped below 76 percent, descended to 69 percent, according to Levada Center («ЛЕВАДА ЦЕНТР», 2011) polling. Additionally by the end of April 2012, (when Putin was preparing for yet another inauguration) sociologists have found that the public's esteem of almost all of the Putin's strengths has returned to the initial level of 2000, when he actually just began his career in politics and society knew little about him (Хампаев, 2012). According to a July 2011 opinion survey by the Russian Levada Center, 53 percent of respondents believed that the upcoming Duma election would be "an imitation of an election and seats in the State Duma will be distributed as the authorities wish," and 59 percent of respondents agreed with a statement that the election was "a struggle of bureaucratic clans for access to the state budget," rather than a free and fair election (OSCE, 2011).

Studies conducted by the Russian Center for Strategic Research (2011), which relied on focus groups, rather accurately predicted back in 2010 that the events that unfolded after the announcement of the tandem swap between Medvedev and Putin in September of 2011. These studies indicated that the public reaction to the tandem swap would be negative and would trigger the radicalization of public opinion. Additionally, it cautioned that criticism of the leadership would soon spread from the Internet to the broader mass media (including the three main strictly censored TV channels). Studies also predicted that the protest sentiments would grow rapidly, especially in large cities rife with popular discontent, and develop into mass anti-government protests. According to the Russian analyst Andrey Kolesnikov, when in September 2011 Putin announced that he would re-assume the presidency the public became more aware of and discontented with the basic authoritarianism of the political system (Kolesnikov, 2011). The dissatisfaction of the Russian public might be partly attributed to the fact that the Russian economy had contracted considerably during the economic crisis of 2008 (World Bank, 2009). It could also be attributed to the fact that high oil prices, the absence of real reforms and growing corruption can propel the country forward only for so long before the reverse movement will occur. The Center for Strategic Research (2011) recently concluded that the Russian middle class can be distinguished by an increased demand for social and political change that the government has failed to deliver over the past decade.

It is no secret to those who read online resources that despite the 'rosy picture' drawn by the state controlled media, Russia's demographic indicators are starting to resemble those of the world's poorest and least developed societies Eberstadt (2011).

Many are also likening contemporary Russia to feudal Europe, a system in which a handful of nobles and regional barons —now called oligarchs—decide everything. (Graham2000) As a consequence Russia has been beating all previous records for growth in the numbers of its billionaires. If in 1999-2000, Forbes' international list did not contain a single Russian billionaire, then in 2010, the magazine "Finans" estimated that Russia had 62 individuals with fortunes of over \$1 billion (Vladimir Milov, 2010). And many of them are longtime associates of Mr. Putin. For example Yuri Kovalchuk a billionaire and longtime friend of Vladimir Putin gained control of six federal channels, which reach no less than 15 million viewers on a daily basis. The other most watched Russian channel, ORT, also bears Mr. Kovalchuk's fingerprints. Millhouse Capital, owned by Putin loyalist and Chelsea football club owner Roman Abramovich, hold the remaining 24 percent of the shares in ORT TV (Анастасия Жохова, 2011).

At the same time, Russia has suffered many natural and man-made catastrophes in recent years that have demonstrated even to those who watch state TV the ineffectiveness of the corrupt government system and the nepotism-infected medieval social order. Government response to technological disasters, transportation accidents, terrorist acts, the sprawling forest fires of 2010 (The Current Digest, 2010) was found to be severely lacking. The mass slaughter in Kushevskaya village of the Krasnodar Region reveals the true nature of the Putin's stability that is often contrasted to the anarchy of the Yeltsin period. All of these events could not but help to negatively influence public opinion.

A 2010 Levada poll found that more than 70 percent of Russians believe civil servants routinely defy the law, while citizens' contempt for the police has become a matter of national consensus. The Analytical Center, Bashkirova and Partners (Демократия в России: 2006-2011, 2011) reported that from 2006 to 2010, about 30 percent of Russians considered that the country was moving in the wrong direction. In 2011 that number climbed to 45 percent of respondents. The Center concluded that there is a noticeable gap between the things Russians consider important (how they would like to see their country) and the actual situation. At the same time it is important to remember that a considerable gap between the expectations and the reality, as well as a general dissatisfaction with the situation in a country, can influence the level of social-

political situation in the society. These ideas correlate well with the assertions of Rimskii (2011) who claims that 'online' identities gradually make their way into the real world, which often leads to crises because the adaptation of identity lags behind the changes in reality. An opinion poll conducted by Levada Center (Appendix C) (Россияне об акциях протеста и прошедших выборах, 2011) indicates that the majority of those polled considered protests as a descent against the lawlessness of the establishment.

At the outset, Medvedev reached out to liberals and intellectuals, by inviting them to the Presidential Council for Human Rights and Civil Society. Comprehensive reports were written that made no difference since Medvedev was powerless to make policy. (Gessen, 2012)

The report of Director of US National Intelligence (Clapper, 2011) summarizes the situation:

President Medvedev's call for "modernization" has sparked a debate among the Moscow elite—and on the blogosphere—about whether modernization is possible without political liberalization. In 2010, Russia saw a number of spontaneous protests, in part against unpopular government actions but also of a more nationalist bent.

### **Emigration**

Negative sentiments about a country one lives in, will eventually force people into one of two directions-- to emigrate or to protest. According to the independent Levada Center as well as the Kremlin-friendly WSCOM about 20 percent of Russians are contemplating about emigrating from the country. Among 18- to 35-year-olds, close to 40 percent of respondents indicated that they would like to emigrate.

A poll, "Why people emigrate from Russia"<sup>28</sup> (Всероссийский центр изучения общественного мнения, 2011) has indicated that the motives for emigration from Russia range from a desire to increase one's living standards (42 percent), to a longing for more social order (18 percent), to a quest for more opportunities (15 percent).

According to Sergei Stepashin (Loiko, 2011), head of the Russian National Audit Chamber, roughly 1.25 million Russians have left the country in the last 10 years. Stepashin estimates that the exodus is so large that it is comparable in numbers to the emigration in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. Experts of the Berlin Institute for Population and Development

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<sup>28</sup> A poll covering 1600 Russians that was conducted by WSCOM on 10-11 September, two weeks prior to the infamous convention of the 'United Russia'.

(Rainer Lindner) also believe that 100,000 to 150,000 people now leave Russia annually and warn that the exodus reached dangerous dimensions in the last three years. The 6 percent who do emigrate are the most active, educated and productive members of Russian society. The fact that this segment of society is moved to leave the country, points to the fact that people do not see opportunities in Russia. The middle class is troubled by the rotting condition of the country, the absence of political opportunities, nepotism, growing administrative lawlessness, the dependence of the courts, bureaucratic red tape and ever-present corruption (NEWSru.com , 2011).

## **PROTESTS OF DECEMBRISTS 2.0**

Etling, Alexanyan, Kelly, Faris, Palfrey, and Gasser (2010) claim that the Russian blogosphere meets many of the prerequisites of a networked 'public sphere', as it is a predominantly peer-produced space, which draws on Web 2.0 resources. Many bloggers use their space on the cyber platform to observe and report on the actions of the government and power elites. The Russian blogosphere is not only a space to discuss politics and criticize the government, but also a place to mobilize political and social action. Many Russians (for lack of other avenues in a 'vertical of power' state) have started airing their grievances directly to the President, Prime Minister and regional Governors via the Internet. The notion of bringing personal grievances to the ruler and bypassing dysfunctional bureaucracies, goes back if not to tsarist Russia, then certainly to the times of Soviet 'blat' (Ledeneva, 2009) The idea that the blogosphere would serve as a substitute for the Russian public sphere is prevalent. The role of the blogosphere in Russian society is sometimes compared to that of literature in the nineteenth century or the independent media in the 1990's. The emergence of new media such as blogs, social networks, and micro-blogs has allowed citizens to mobilize around social and political causes. Social atomization has led Russians to rely primarily on their personal networks to learn from and help each other.

Anti-corruption campaigns by blogger Alexei Navalny have (KASPAROV, 2012) been so successful that around 30 percent (levada) of the population have heard his term 'party of thieves and crooks' in reference to the Putin's United Russia. During campaign debates on television and in the media, parties running against United Russia have incorporated the phrase, referring to their opponents frequently as the "party of crooks and thieves." The phrase may well have contributed to an accelerating loss of popular support for the United Russia Party (Nichol, 2011).

Many people tried to express their dissatisfaction with the current regime by voting for any other party, but not for the United Russia. Even the 'rigged' results in December 2011 showed that the United Russia party received slightly less than 50 percent of the votes. This figure indicates that Putin's party lost by an additional 14 percent compared with the 2007 elections.

Undoubtedly the December 2011 elections were no more rigged than the previous ones and Putin's return to the Kremlin was a surprise only to the naïve. But in 2011 the public reaction to the election was different than in previous years. That year saw a great increase in citizen activism in which ordinary citizens used mobile devices and the Internet to record and spread the evidence of the election fraud by the United Russia. An online search for the Russian phrase "narusheniya na viborash" or "election fraud" in English brings up 7,730 videos on YouTube and 22,381 videos on the Russian site Rutube.

News of the blatant election fraud angered the city population to the point that up to 120,000 people gathered on December 24<sup>th</sup> on Sakharov Avenue to protest with the slogan "For Honest Elections!" The Levada Center (Левада-Центр, 2011) points out that the average protester in Moscow came to the demonstrations to show their "outrage with the rigging of the elections" and the "state of affairs in the country and policy of the state" and to express "dissatisfaction with the fact that main decisions in the country are taken without public participation." In this respect, Shirky (2011) reminds us that a public sphere is more likely to emerge in a society as a result of people's dissatisfaction with matters of economics or day-to-day governance than from their embrace of abstract political ideals.

Characteristically, the largest concentration of protests in December 2011 took place in Moscow. The reasons for this are many. Aside from the larger population of the city, Muscovites tend to be more educated and therefore spend more time on the Internet. Having more vocational training, life success and social independence, Russians who live in major metropolitan areas demand their dignity and rights as citizens. However, over 60 percent of the population of the Russian Federation resides in small towns, villages and "urban villages," communities whose citizens share other traits and values such as patience and tenacity, with other means of self-expression.

A sociological profile of an average protester indicates the extent to which the December 2011 protesters relied upon the Internet. It can be hypothesized that this protesting member of the intelligentsia or the middle class would have relative economic independence and a high level of

education. The Levada Center polled people who were entering and exiting the demonstration on Sakharov Avenue on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December. (Левада-Центр, 2011) The results of this poll are in the Appendix A.

According to the poll, the average protestor was an employed, highly educated male-- 60 percent of the protesters were men-- from Moscow or the Moscow Region. He/she was either a professional or middle range manager and most probably learned of the protests online where he/she discussed them in a social network. More than 60% of protestors supported a politically free society based on a market economy. He/she was ready to come to other protests and volunteer as an observer during future elections.

The same poll indicated that the main sources of information for the protesters were news resources of which 70 percent were on the Internet. Thirty-eight percent of the protesters learned of the gathering from friends and relatives and 35 percent learned of them from TV. Twenty-two percent of the protesters read about the demonstrations on the social networks while eight percent learned of them in blogs. Additionally, Yandex analysis (Appendix H) of the discussions that took place in Runet clearly illustrates that in the beginning of December 2011 there was a substantial spike in the use of words such as “protest” and “election” in RuNet blogs. The protest in Moscow was directed by the ‘network conglomerate’, and if until recently in the social networks there were separate narrow groups of dissatisfied citizens, now the Internet community is grasping larger slices of the population.

The Levada Center poll indicated that the protestors were slightly better off<sup>29</sup> than the average Russian. Poverty forces people into conformity and dependence on government. On the other hand, prosperity, even if relative gives birth to independence and multiplies differences in social groups. But what truly distinguished these protestors from the average population was their level of education. Sixty-two percent had a university degree, 8 percent had either two bachelor’s degrees or a master’s degree. In total, 70 percent of the protestors might be

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<sup>29</sup> Among the population of the country the predominant group is the one that has enough money for food and clothing, but purchase of long term things like TVs or refrigerator is difficult (46 percent country wide) then the protestors on Sakharov in majority stepped to the next level. 40 percent can buy a TV or refrigerator but cannot afford a car. 28 percent can buy a car but cannot say that they are unrestrained in their finances. Only 3 percent can afford anything they want (Левада-Центр, 2011).

characterized as highly educated people, while according to the latest census only 51 percent of those living in Moscow had higher education.

Thus it is clear that the core of the protesting group in Moscow were members of the Russian middle class or intelligentsia who relied heavily on the Internet to receive information on the unfolding situation and to organize as well. It is therefore no surprise that during the December elections, Web sites that published reports of electoral fraud were disabled by hacker attacks, as reported by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor of the US Department of State in its annual report (US Department of State).

### **POSSIBLE PARALLELS WITH THE ARAB SPRING**

This paper would be incomplete if it were to omit a discussion of the Arab Spring events and its possible parallels with the events in Moscow.

In the wake of the Moscow protests, many Western commentators and politicians saw similarities between the Internet-supported Arab Spring and the Moscow protests of the middle class. Some even predicted the inevitable downfall of the Putin regime (Aron, 2011). Nevertheless the Moscow protests did not turn out to be nearly as productive as the events in the Arab world. Vladimir Putin is president for the third time, after having served prime minister in the tandem with his protégé Dmitri Medvedev. Vladimir Putin and his regime were taken by surprise by the wave of the winter protests and were on the verge of a panic. Nevertheless after Putin once again won the Presidential elections the protesting wave began to quickly lose its power. The expectation of an immediate success did not come true and hence there was a loss of the romantic impulse.

Nevertheless the Russian authorities followed the unfolding of the events of the Arab Spring things very closely. The Arab revolutions have raised more awareness among "cyber-conservatives" and "siloviki" in the Russian government who focus on the threats posed by the Web on political and social stability. The Putin regime was well aware that elements of the Arab Spring--both public unhappiness and social networks-- were present in Russia. In March 2011, Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin, established a parallel between the fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt and the "involvement" of Google suggesting that "the same scenario" was reserved for Russia. Shortly thereafter, the head of the protection center information and special



communications of the Federal Security Service's (FSB) Alexander Andreyechkin, called Skype, Gmail and Hotmail a threat to the national security of Russia (Reuters, 2011).

Commenting on the Arab Spring Vladimir Putin (Putin, Russia and the changing world, 2012) had this to say:

The Arab Spring has graphically demonstrated that world public opinion is being shaped by the most active use of advanced information and communications technology. It is possible to say that the Internet, the social networks, cell phones, etc. have turned – on a par with television – into an effective tool for the promotion of domestic and international policy. This new variable has come into play and gives us food for thought [...]

Despite prudent words by Putin, in reality the state-controlled media bombarded domestic audiences with predictions of chaos and instability as a consequence of the Arab protests, with a clear message that demands for political reform in Russia would have similarly catastrophic results (Puddington, 2012).

Previous sections of this paper have demonstrated that information about the acts of lawlessness by the Putin regime transmitted via the Internet served to anger the middle class and that the protesters in Moscow relied on the Internet to organize as did the protesters in the Arab world. But as Charles Tilly (1975) wrote “Not that all rural rebellions are alike” and there exist some important differences that need to be addressed in order to understand what the future might hold for the Russian Internet and the middle class as well. Therefore the following section of the paper will illustrate the similarities and the differences between the two Internet-instigated mass protests.

### **The Protesting Classes and their Grievances**

In the Arab world the majority of the protestors were the desperate, poor, and young with diplomas but no jobs<sup>30</sup>. Fareed Zakaria (2011) writes that the 60 percent of the region's population is under 30 while youth unemployment remains close to 25%.

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<sup>30</sup> Egypt's unemployment rate is 9.4 percent as of the last quarter of 2009, according to a report released in February 2010 by the country's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics. Approximately 2.3 million Egyptian workers are unemployed, the report found. Over a million of the unemployed held high school diplomas, while almost 900,000 had college degrees. The median age was 24. In Tunisia, where the median age is 30 years old, approximately 23 percent of the 10 million people who live there are under the age of 14. In Egypt, where the median age is 24, 33 percent of the country's 83 million inhabitants are less than 14 years old (Pappas, 2011).

In Moscow, on the other hand, the protestors were older, educated citizens with higher than average incomes. Compared to a country like Tunisia, the Russian and Moscow economies in particular are still relatively strong, allowing the middle class to find employment<sup>31</sup>, participate in consumer society, travel abroad and save. In Moscow, 48 percent of the protestors were comprised of "professionals" (Левада-Центр, 2011). This is, in fact, a portrait of contemporary Russian intelligentsia. While both Arabs and Russians addressed the autocratic governments<sup>32</sup> hiding behind the legitimacy of democracy--the protestors' represented different social groups and their demands were not the same.

A decade of economic growth has increased the population of Russia's middle class. Having reached Western levels of consumerism, the middle class sought respect, independent courts, lawful police, just courts, good health care and a free, unbiased media. It also desired genuine political representation. In Russia, at least initially, the protestors did not demand the resignation of the president or the prime minister, nor were there clear established opposition leaders with a clear program. The demands of the Moscow middle class were political and in some respects 'aesthetic' since Muscovites like no other class in Russia are still reaping the economic rewards of the Putin regime.

### **The Public Sphere**

In the Arab world, Islam creates very strong horizontal links between the members of the society. Religion is so central to the lives of the Arab protestors that most of the protests happened after noon prayers on Friday (GOODMAN, 2011). On the other hand Orthodoxy in Russia is considered to be a part of a national identity - after it ceased to be a communist ideology.

Howard (Xiolin Zhuo, 2011) observes that democratization movements existed in North Africa and the Middle East long before technologies such as mobile phones, the Internet, and social media came to the region. However, with these technologies people who share an interest in democracy learned to build extensive networks, create social capital, and organize political action. Anderson (2011) notes that Egypt has a culture of deep communal bonds and trust, which manifested itself in the demonstrators' incredible discipline and their ability to organize

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<sup>31</sup> According to the Moscow department of economic policy and development the average salary in Moscow in 2011 was 16 thousand dollars per year. In Russia proper it is slightly more than 9 thousand dollars per year (Newsru, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> In Russia, according to Levada polls, it is evident that 46 percent of the population considers the protests as a refusal to tolerate a systematic abuse of rights («ЛЕВАДА ЦЕНТР», 2011).

without any centralized leadership. But the Levada polls indicate that although 43 percent of the respondents supported the protests only 13 percent indicated that they were willing to participate (15 percent in December) while 78 percent were not willing to get involved (Левада-Центр, 2012).

The Moscow protests brought together different people who were not related by age<sup>33</sup>, indicating a growth of social diversity, even in relatively close sectors of the population. A very important difference between the Moscow protests and previous demonstrations was a rather high density of various horizontal connections between protestors: relatives, friends, acquaintances and professionals. For the first time a wide protest unified many communities previously separate and self-isolated from each other. Thus the capacity for solidarity, the ability to mobilize funds, organize events and establish contact between representatives of the establishment and the outside world began to grow.

The “strong-tie” phenomenon that is present in many movements. One study of the Red Brigades, the Italian terrorist group of the nineteen-seventies, found that seventy per cent of recruits had at least one good friend already in the organization (Gladwell, 2010). In Russia the level of “offline” solidarity is also growing. According to the Levada Center (Левада-Центр, 2011) 40 percent of young protesters received information about the civil protests from friends, colleagues, relatives and via social networks (among younger groups the figure was more than half). Sixty-nine percent of Bolotnaya Square protestors came with friends and acquaintances while 23 percent were alone.

### **The Use of Technology**

Phillip Howard, and his colleagues of Washington State University, have noted in a recent report (Philip Howard, 2011) that during the Arab events a spike in online conversations about revolution often preceded major events on the ground. As in Russia, the most critical coverage of government abuses was done not by newspaper reporters, but by citizen journalists using their access to the Internet in creative ways. In the Arab world, less than 20 percent of the

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<sup>33</sup>“When compared with the age- structure of the population of the capital, young people under 24 years of age went to the demonstrations more actively, and also surf the web at a rate 1.5 times the national average. About 25 percent of the population in Tunisia and 10 percent of the population in Egypt has used the Internet at least once, with much of the use concentrated among young people. Some 66 percent of the Internet-savvy population in Tunisia, and 70 percent in Egypt, is under the age of 34.” (Philip Howard, 2011)

overall population actively used social-media websites, but almost everyone had access to a mobile phone. Social media brought a flow of messages about freedom and democracy across North Africa and the Middle East and helped raise public expectations for the success of political uprising.

But Morozov (2011) suggests that democratic revolutions would have happened without the Internet, and that the revolutions throughout history are driven by cultural factors. The better coordination of resources increases the expected mass, when people can clearly see how many others share their perspective. But for critical mass to reach the tipping point, the Internet is not enough and horizontal links within a society need to be present. One might say that actual friends and acquaintances are needed as opposed to mere “Facebook friends.”

### **The critical mass**

Both the Russian and Arab protests unfolded according to the dynamics of civil revolutions described by Timur Kuran, (1991a). Writing about the surprising mass uprisings in Eastern Europe in 1989-90, Kuran noted that one individual's political action encourages others to participate by reducing the costs of protest. When ICTs are applied to Kuran's theory we get what Othman Laraki (Laraki, 2011), director of Twitter Geolocation calls “The Economics of Dissent” He argues that the lower cost of expressing dissent increases the supply of those willing to express discontent. Garrett (2006 citing Bonchek 1997, p.207) writes that “by lowering communication and coordination costs, ICTs facilitate group formation, recruitment, and retention while improving group efficiency, all of which contribute to increasing political participation.”

Still, the Western politicians, academics and journalists who have overestimated the role that the Internet will play in Russian society in the immediate future are exhibiting wishful thinking. The much-touted parallels between the Arab Twitter revolutions that ousted presidents in Tunisia and in Egypt and the Russian protests of 2011 are only such on the surface. One cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach in analyzing political events in different countries. Unfortunately, regarding the Internet, there is a tendency to generalize that it is used in the same ways everywhere and has the same universal meanings. That is not the case. The events of the Arab Spring in Egypt and the protests in Moscow are as similar as the uprisings in Tunis and Zuccotti Park in New York City. During the 2011 protests, the Russian intelligentsia announced its existence on the squares and avenues of Moscow, finally withdrawing from the “kitchen.” In general, the intelligentsia - those who were protesting in Moscow-- demanded

## 61 Internet in Moscow protests of the middle class

representation. That is why the comparison with orange revolutions is simply sociologically inaccurate: intellectual protests are peaceful. That is good news for the current Russian regime.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to decipher the role played by the Internet in facilitating the mass protests of the middle class in Moscow. It did so by examining how the media censorship by the “managed democracy” regime coupled with public grievances have pushed the growing middle class to post their complaints and observations in cyberspace. The ever increasing numbers of Internet users in Russia, the growing middle class and the absence of other outlets for citizens to express their grievances have turned the online world of blogs, posts and comments into the Russian public sphere.

Analysis of the sociological aspects of the Moscow protests has confirmed the initial hypothesis. The people who participated in the protests were representative of the capital’s middle class or intelligentsia seeking the establishment of a society in which all will be equal before the law. Polls uncovered the fact that the protesters received most of their information about the grievances, election fraud and protests online. The immediate trigger for the mass demonstrations may have been the widely circulated YouTube videos that suggested ballot-stuffing and other forms of election fraud. However, the protests were also inspired by the simmering public resentment over the months-earlier announcement that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev had “long ago” forged an agreement to swap positions at the end of Medvedev’s term in 2012 (Puddington, 2012).

At the same time, this paper attempted to examine the protests in the context of Russian society at large. The Moscow events unfolded within the paradigm of Putin’s Leviathan state, which in its turn exists within a larger context of historically and sociologically complex Russia. Any study of technology’s promulgation throughout Russian society without a deep understanding of the sociological processes taking place in that country will inevitably create a distorted picture. Because new technologies are primarily digital communication tools, their use depends on the characteristics and the degree of maturity of each respective society. Russia is no exception to this framework and the overwhelming majority of Internet usage remains outside of politics, while the protesters were not representatives of society as a whole. Having gained a sufficient degree of economic prosperity, the Moscow middle class was the first stratum of Russian society to stand up to the lawlessness of the Putin regime.

Although admittedly not exhaustive, this study has shown that the system of “managed democracy” has brought previously unseen economic prosperity to Russia as well as a return to

the "old" Soviet-style media control. At the same time the development of new communications technologies began to create a public sphere where citizens could connect, and discuss their country's future outside of the government's control. Given the extent of media censorship, online discussions have become the only arena for the growing Internet-savvy middle class to express grievances. But it would be a mistake to assume that the other parts of society would engage in protest upon being connected to the Internet.

This study has also tried to demonstrate that despite its evident strengths in uniting individuals and forming a public sphere, technology cannot replace a regular civil society whose duty is to nurture political parties, platforms, ideologies and leaders. In countries where the civil society is not developed, there is a natural temptation to reduce its role to law enforcement. There are also examples of more "niche" approaches, regarding civil society as a sphere of self-manifestation of free citizens on the Internet. However, civil society can only mature; it cannot be born suddenly on the streets or squares, as reported by many commentators. Notions that the street can be the midwife of civil society are erroneous if not naïve.

In the concluding sections of this paper, an attempt has been made to compare the Moscow protests with the uprisings popularly known as the 'Arab Spring'. The study has demonstrated that apart from the use of ITCs there are very few parallels between these events and as a consequence few reasons for the same scenarios of political overthrow to occur in Russia.

The population of Moscow is approximately 15 to 20 million people, but only 1 to 2 percent attended the demonstrations. Half of the protesters - those from the public sector, would not even dream of political independence from the Kremlin. According to research by the Institute of Sociology, only 6 percent of poor households in Russia have a computer. Among the entire population of Russia as a whole, the figure is closer to 19 percent. Active Internet users in Russia account for only 42.3 persons out of a thousand. This number demonstrates that the spread of the Internet in the country is actually very small and its influence on the "mindset" of Russians as a whole is clearly exaggerated. These figures show that the majority of the population does not want and does not understand the need for their involvement in urgent reforms.

In reality, the use of new technologies-- primarily digital communication tools--depends on the characteristics and degree of maturity of each society. Shirky (2011) reminds that that positive pro-democratic changes, follow, rather than precede, the development of a strong public

sphere. Opinions are first transmitted by the media, and then they get echoed by friends, family members, and colleagues, thus forming political opinions in the public sphere.

The reality of Russian society is reflected in the blogosphere. The blogosphere could be compared in some way to the "kitchen discussions" of the Soviet era, whose objective was not in forming a united front against the state but rather to build a personal network as a substitute for social institutions. Thus, the blogosphere tends to reflect the main features of Russian society: a negative attitude towards official institutions. And television is still far ahead of the Internet <sup>34</sup> (Appendix F), as a news source. In fact 90 percent of the Russian population still gets news from TV. Despite the fact that the state-censored TV content satisfies only 29 percent (58 percent dissatisfied) half of the capital's youth continue to watch TV news. Thus if it is not reported on TV, it does not exist for an absolute majority of the Russian populace.

Hopefully, the awakening of the Russian society and the emergence of the new generation, free from the Soviet stereotypes gives, the country a chance for democratic reforms that seemed to have been buried during the 12 year reign of Putin.

But Russia has to make a choice not only between Putinism and democracy. In its desire to "strengthen the state" the regime has awakened the forces that it can no longer control. Nationalism and xenophobia that Putin has released to subdue the freedom wave are more dangerous for his regime than all the liberals taken together.

## **Future research**

The protests that roiled Moscow and other Russian cities in the wake of the deeply flawed December parliamentary elections were stark reminders that no authoritarian leadership, no matter how sophisticated its methods, is immune to popular demands for change. There are many questions about the ability of the forces that led the post-election protests to influence future politics in Russia. But clearly Russia is not alone in its vulnerability to popular discontent with authoritarian leadership and the notion of "president for life".

Having declared on September 24, 2011 that the decision to swap places had been long in the making, the tandem partnership of Putin-Medvedev opened Pandora's-box. Their actions gave a clear signal to the country that "stability is based not on the legitimacy, but rather on its

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<sup>34</sup> Poll conducted on 8-16 December 2011 using representational samples of a 1000 Muscovites 18 years up. Statistical error no more than 4.3percent (Левада-Центр, 2011).



mirage.” The many pieces of evidence revealing the extent of the rigged elections “were the catalyzers of the hidden frustration of the public” which responded by taking to the streets. The two men had failed to fulfill longstanding promises to reform Russia’s corrupt, stagnant, and unresponsive government system, and the idea of Putin’s return for a third and possibly fourth presidential term helped drive ordinary Russians to the streets in unprecedented demonstrations (Puddington, 2012).

Future research could concentrate on the manner how the Russian authorities will deal with their *Zugzwang*, since the state must make a move regarding the Internet, when it prefers for society to make one. This study could employ combinatorial game theory.

The scenario in which the Internet is supposed to assist the regime without at the same time hampering it leads to “the dictator’s dilemma” when a state accustomed to having a monopoly on public speech finds itself called to account for anomalies between its view of events and that of the public’s. The two responses to the “dictator’s dilemma” are censorship and propaganda. But neither of these is as effective a source of control. The state will censor critics or produce propaganda as it needs to, but both of those actions have higher costs than simply not having any critics to silence or reply to in the first place. If a government were to shut down Internet access or ban cell phones, it would risk radicalizing otherwise pro-regime citizens or harming the economy.

It is clear that the Putin regime will not abandon the power it has accumulated over the years. At the same time the current state of affairs, namely the widespread corruption that both holds the system together and serves as a target for public protest is not sustainable. A situation in which the Internet can have a positive effect on the economy without simultaneously threatening the *status quo* is hard to maintain, even though the Soviet -educated leaders look towards this model.

## Appendix A

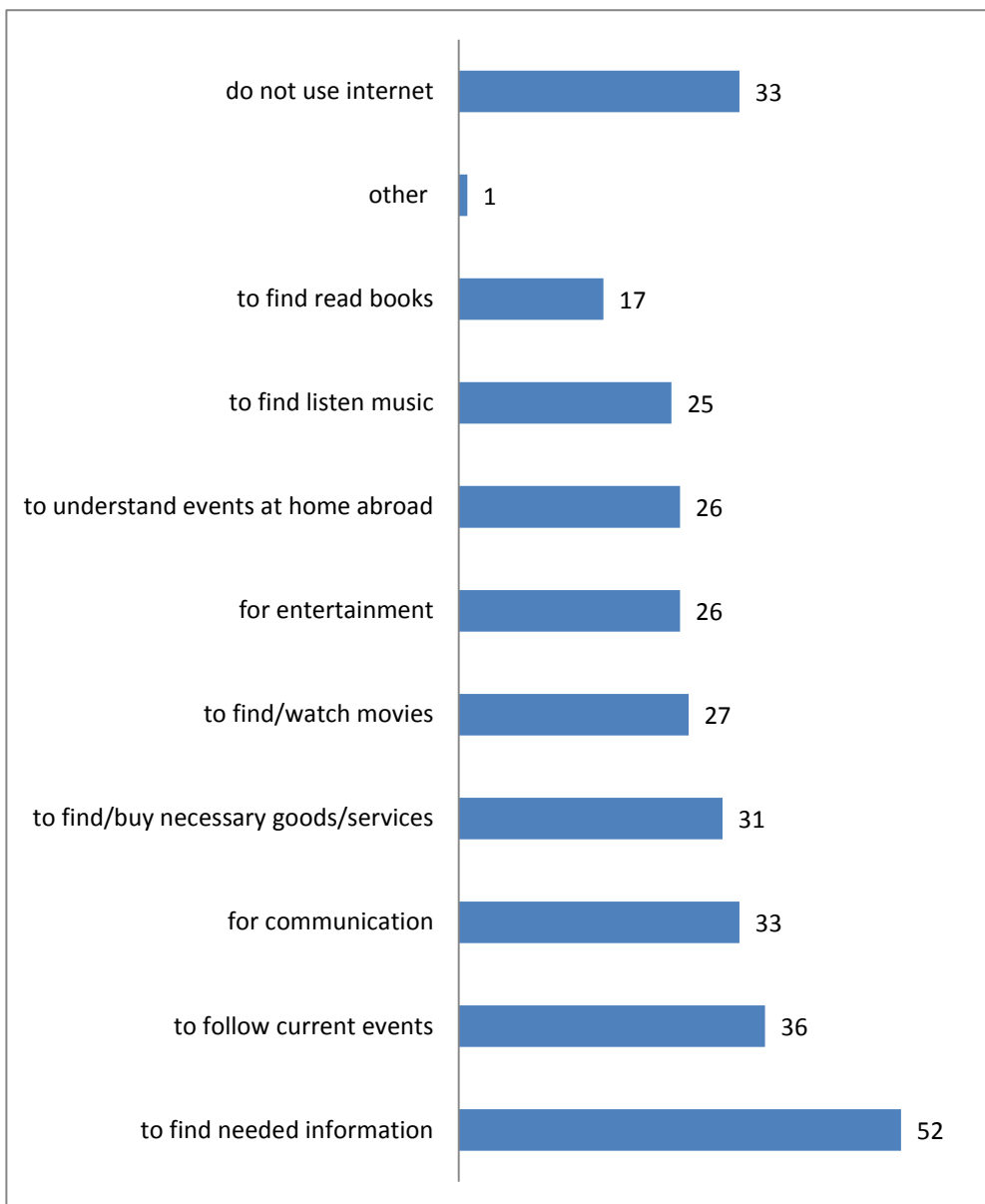
<b>Gender</b>	60percent	male
<b>Education</b>	1percent	some technical college
	17percent	technical college
	13percent	some university
	62percent	university degree
	8percent	two degrees/receiving second degree
<b>Residence</b>	78percent	Moscow
	18percent	Moscow Region
<b>Age</b>	31percent	25-39 years old
	25percent	18-24 years old
	23percent	40-54 years old
	22percent	22-55 years old
<b>Occupation</b>	46.0percent	professionals
	16.5percent	managers(half have more than 10 subordinates)
	7.7percent	business owners
	7.7percent	office workers
	12.0percent	students
	4.2percent	sales/service
	3.8percent	workers
	1.6percent	housewives
	12.0percent	retired
<b>How learned of protests</b>	56percent	learned of the protests from internet publications
	33percent	from other sources online
	18percent	from TV
	67.60percent	discussed protests in social networks
	33percent	from friends and neighbor's
	27percent	heard about the protests for "Fair elections" on radio
<b>Why protested</b>	72.50percent	rigged elections

## 67 Internet in Moscow protests of the middle class

	72.80percent	country state of affairs
	51.70percent	not take opinion in consideration
	41.70percent	disappointment in modernization and president Medvedev
	15.20percent	solidarity with parties in protests
	13percent	personal liking of the organizers
	15.50percent	together with friends and general inters
<b>Protesting experience</b>	37percent	this protest was the first protest against the rigging of the elections
	56percent	took part in the protest on the Bolotnaya
	22percent	took part on Chitie Prudi
<b>Future</b>	44percent	are ready to go as monitors during the presidential elections
	82percent	are ready to manifest in case of rigging of those elections
<b>Income</b>		
not enough money for food	3percent	
enough money for food, but can not afford clothes	4percent	
have money for food and clothing about things like TV or fridge are difficulty for us	21percent	
we can buy TV or fridge but cannot buy car	40percent	
we can buy car, but can not say that we are not restrained in funds	28percent	
we can afford anything	5percent	

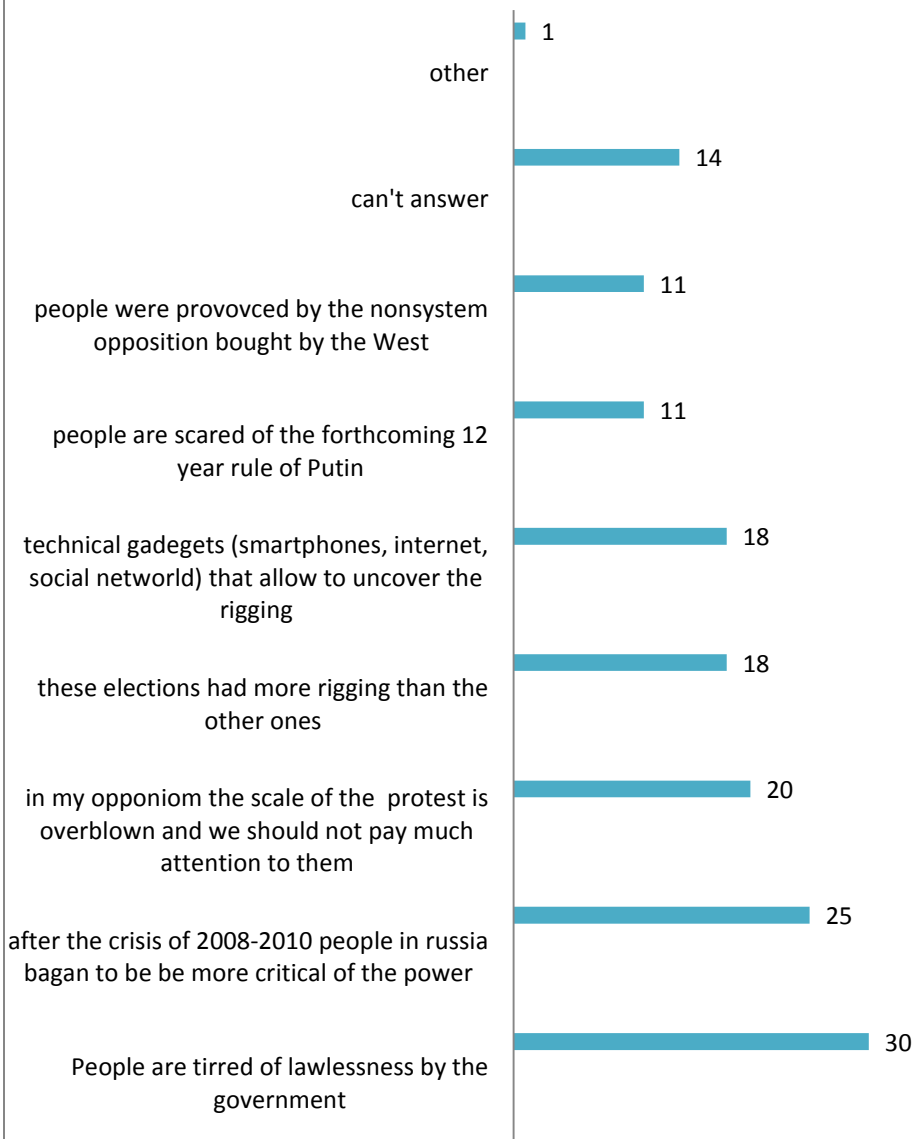
Statistical error 4.8 percent

## Appendix B



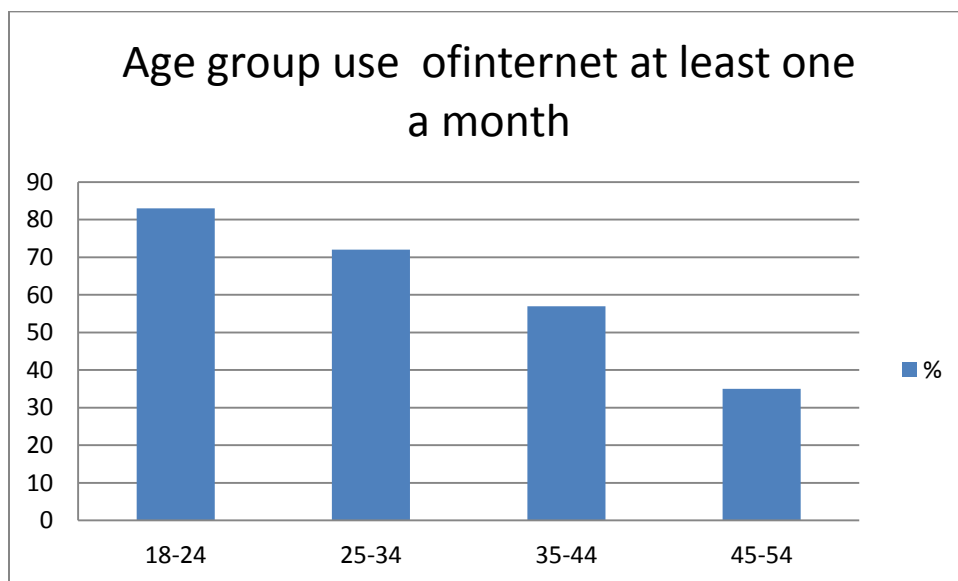
## Appendix C

### why participants in these protests came out to the streets of large cities?

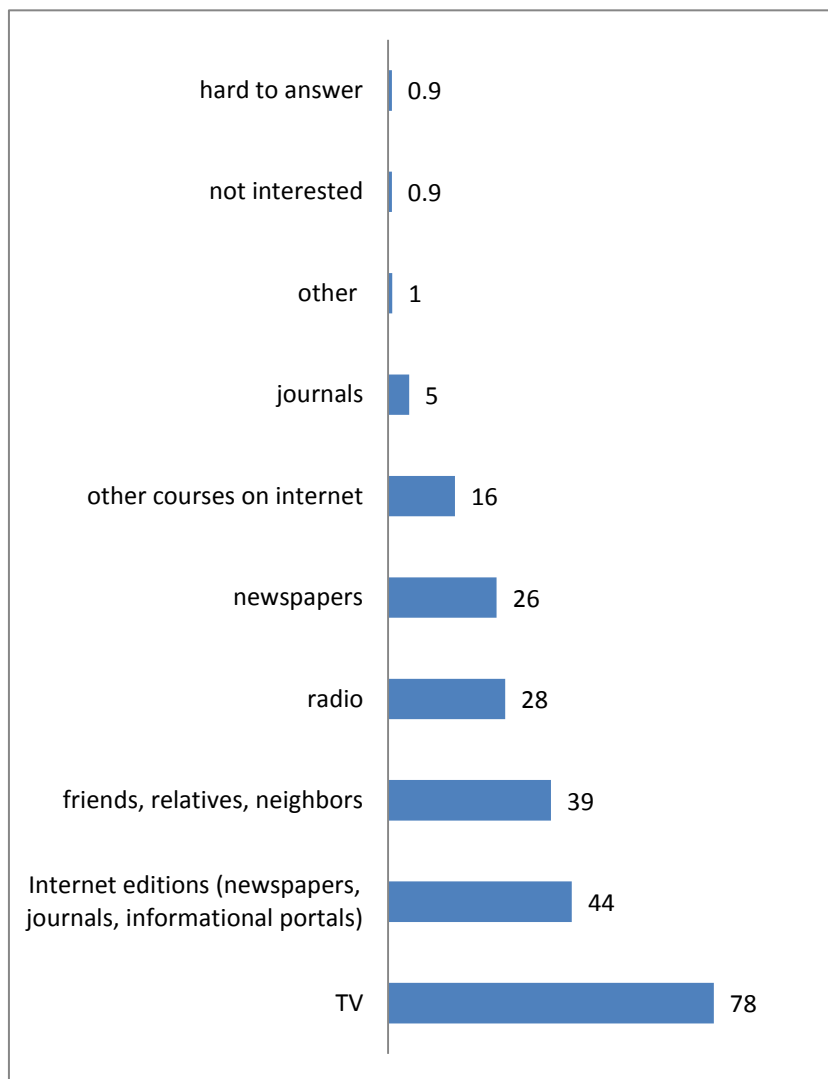


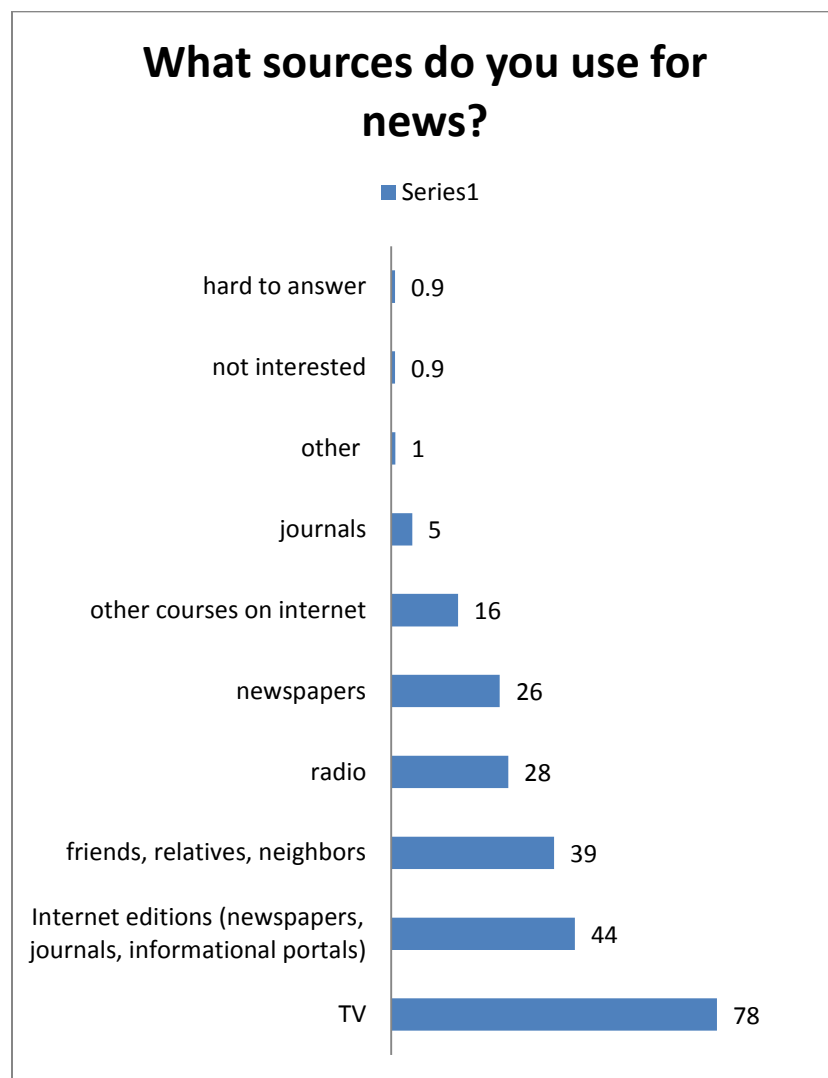
(

## Appendix D



## Appendix E



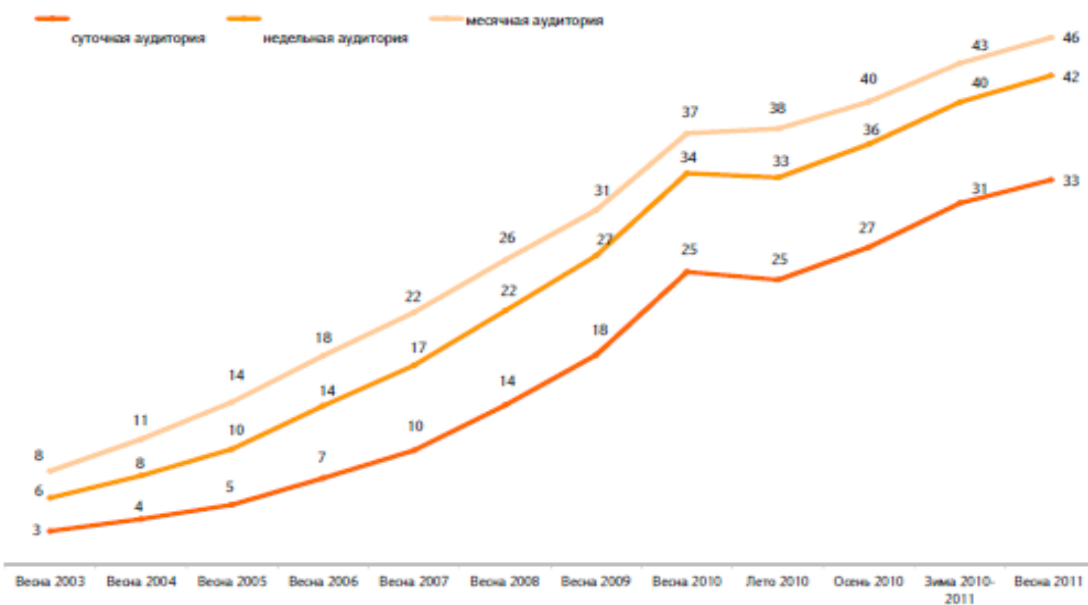


## Appendix F



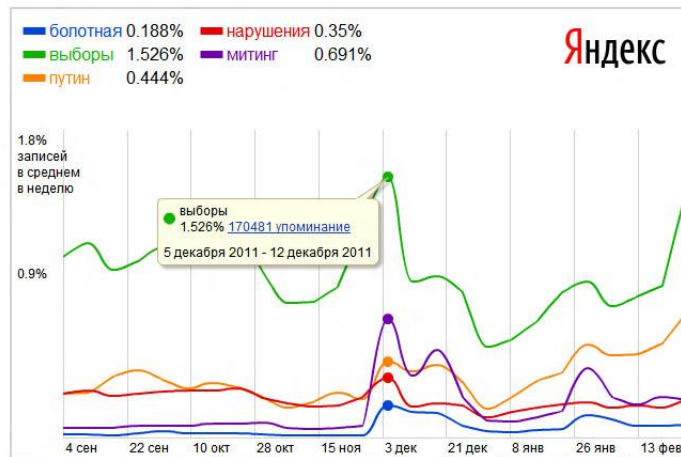
## Appendix G

1.1. Численность интернет - пользователей. Динамика. Россия, 18 лет и старше, %



## Appendix H

Пульс блогосферы — **болотная** , **выборы** , **путин** , **нарушения** и **МИТИНГ**



### Что такое пульс?

<b>болотная</b>	
В среднем за неделю	4230
<b>Максимум</b>	16981
5-12 декабря 2011	
<b>выборы</b>	
В среднем за неделю	71373
<b>Максимум</b>	155303
5-12 декабря 2011	
<b>путин</b>	
В среднем за неделю	25515
<b>Максимум</b>	48588
27 февраля — 5 марта 2012	
<b>нарушения</b>	
В среднем за неделю	16392
<b>Максимум</b>	35916
5-12 декабря 2011	
<b>МИТИНГ</b>	
В среднем за неделю	13227
<b>Максимум</b>	67590
5-12 декабря 2011	

Интересные те...  
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